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DEAD-SHOT DANDY RAISED THE OUTLAW IN HIS STRONG ARMS, AS THOUGH HE HAD BEEN A CHILD,
AND THREW HIM ACROSS THE SADDLE.

Dead-Shot Dandy's Double;

OR,

BENITO, THE BOY PARD.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "DEAD SHOT DANDY," "KITTY,
THE BOY ROVER," "MERLE, THE BOY
CRUISER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL'S PROMISE.

A MAIDEN was riding alone over the prairies, and her course lay for San Antonio, that ancient town of the Lone Star State.

She was well mounted upon a wiry mustang that pulled hard on the bit, as though anxious to reach the town, visible a league ahead, but his rider curbed his impatience and seemed to prefer to go at a slow pace.

Scarcely over seventeen, she yet possessed a form of exquisite grace, set off by a riding-habit of dark green, trimmed with gold lace.

Her face was very beautiful, innocent as a child's, and yet possessed features that were strongly stamped with pride, resolution and character far beyond her years.

That she belonged to the higher walks of life, was evident from her air of refinement and her dress, which was elegant. While her bridle and saddle were silver-mounted and very richly carved.

"Well, Mischief, do you want a drink? for yonder is the spring, and if you do not, I do," she said to her pony, as she turned him toward a clump of timber half a mile away.

"Strange that my father has not come, for he is so prompt to keep his promises, and the day he set has passed a week ago.

"I hope no harm has befallen him, but somehow I always dread trouble in this wild land.

"Though I only see him twice each year, I love him devotedly, and now that I have completed my studies, I intend to urge him to take me to his ranch, wherever it is, for I declare I do not know.

"I could make his home so comfortable for him, and I can take care of myself if it is in a dangerous part of the country, for I can throw a lariat, ride like a Comanche, and am a dead shot, am I not, Mischief— Oh! there is a chance for a shot."

Quick as a flash, she whipped out a small revolver from a holster on her saddle-horn, and aimed at a bird which had just flown from the prairie grass, and was hovering on wings some twenty paces distant.

With the crack of the pistol the bird dropped dead, and the report startling its mate from its hiding-place it too was shot on the wing.

"Was that not well done, Mischief?" she said, preparing to reload the weapon as she rode along.

But there was something out of order with the weapon, some screw loose, and, with an impatient exclamation she thrust it back into its

holster and rode on at a canter toward the spring she had referred to, and which she knew was in the shelter of the timber ahead.

The clump of trees was a favorite camping-place of trains, scouts, and soldiers on the march, for there was good water in plenty, the grass grew rich upon the surrounding prairie, and then there was plenty of wood for the cheerful camp-fires.

When expecting one of her father's semi-annual visits, the maiden was wont to ride out in the afternoon for miles upon the trail she knew he came, and upon his departure would sometimes accompany him upon his way until the town of San Antonio would disappear from sight behind her.

Utterly fearless she cared nothing for the wild characters that infested the region, for if the speed of her pony failed her she had her revolver left, she always said, when warned of danger.

Frequently before she had halted at the spring for a drink for herself and pony, and now she rode directly to the spot where the crystal water bubbled up cool and inviting.

"Don't be greedy, Mischief, but wait until I have had a drink, for you muddy the water playing in it," she said, restraining her pony, and springing from her saddle.

An old tin-cup hung by the spring and taking this she bent over to fill it, when her arms were seized in a grasp she could not shake off, and glancing over her shoulders she saw a fierce face peering into her own.

"Unhand me, senor! how dare you thus seize me?" she cried in stern tones, trying to free her arms from his grasp.

"Now jist be still, leetle gal, an' yer won't git hurted, fer I don't mean you no harm, fer I hez jist tuk yer in fer tin."

"I have but little money with me," answered the maiden, knowing what he meant by tin.

"What I have you can take, and let me go."

"No. I hain't a durned fool."

"What do you mean?"

"I means thet I hes hed my eye on you fer some time, fer yer folks is rich, an' they'll pay ter git you back."

"You are mistaken, my father is not rich, and I am no kindred to the Brents, with whom I dwell."

"Waal, yer is in thar keer; an' I guesses they'll pay ter git yer back."

"Not one peso will they pay."

"Waal, we'll see, fer yer goes with me anyhow."

In vain she tried to free herself, for the man possessed great strength, and said:

"'Tain't no use kickin' ag'in' it, leetle gal, fer yer has ter go. Ef yer goes quiet, all are serene, an' ef yer don't, then I'll tie yer, bind up thet pretty rosebud mouth ter keep yer from shoutin', an' take yer anyhow. What does yer say?"

"I will give you my word to meet you here to-morrow with your price, if you will let me go now."

"Nary, fer yer might hev comp'ny."

"No, I will come alone."

"Yer might hev others ter foller."

"I will not, for I will not speak of my inten-

tion, and I will bring what I have of my own money."

"How much are that?"

"I have five hundred pesos laid up."

"Waal, I wants more."

"I have no more."

"Yer has jewelry, for thar is a watch an' chain, an' some ear-bobs, while I guesses yer gloves hides some rings."

"Well, I will leave my watch and chain with you as security, and return to-morrow with the five hundred."

"Say yer'll fetch ther money, and give me ther trinkets, lettin' me hev ther timer now an yer kin go."

"But yer hes ter promise 'pon yer sacred word yer'll be here."

"I will be here, I promise you."

"At what time?"

"At about this time."

"No, make it a leetle later, so thet I kin hev darkness ter skip in, ef thar were ter be a mistake."

"Very well."

"And yer'll come alone?"

"Yes."

"And won't give it away thet yer is comin' ter meet me?"

"No."

"Thet are good, an' I knows yer'll keep yer word."

"Now, yer kin go, as soon as yer give me ther timer."

He released her as he spoke, and taking off the watch and chain, she handed it to him.

Then she very coolly took a drink of water, and allowed her pony to do likewise.

"Waal, you is a cool one," said the robber, admiringly.

She merely smiled, sprung into her saddle, refusing his proffered assistance, and sallied away out of the timber.

CHAPTER II.

THE BITER BITTEN.

"WAAL, ef thet gal do keep her word, she'll be ther gamest piece o' calico I ever seen in my lifetime."

The speaker was the ruffian who the evening before had seized the maiden at the spring in the timber, and compromised by taking her word to bring him five hundred dollars for her freedom, along with her jewels.

To escape from his clutches she had given the promise, and with the intention of keeping it.

On his part the robber had been willing for the compromise, as he was then a hunted man, and he had no place to take his fair prisoner while he was waiting for ransom.

His horse stood back in the timber, saddled and bridled, ready for a race, should it be necessary, and his rifle hung at his saddle-horn.

The animal was a splendid one, and, in fact, his speed and bottom alone had saved his master from having been suspended to a tree on several occasions.

The man was clad in buckskin, wore a belt of arms, and had a face that was repulsive in the extreme.

Bad Ben was the name he was known by, and he deserved it, for he was one of the most

wicked rascals that haunted the vicinity of San Antonio.

"With ther money," he continued, keeping his eyes on the distant trail leading from San Antonio, "I will dust out o' this, fer 'tain't healthy fer a man in a commoonity whar they offers a thousand dollars fer him, dead or alive."

"I'll strike fer New Mexico, an' I guesses thet part o' ther kentry will jist suit me."

"Ef ther gal comes, tho'?" and he peered anxiously into the distance in search for the hoped-for maiden.

"Ef I hed a place ter take her, an' somebody ter negotiate fer me, I'd hold her fer ransom, as them Brents w'u'd pay a big sum fer her, bein' as she are left in the'r charge."

"But I might git a rope cravat while waitin', so I'll jist sail off with what I kin git."

"Ah! thar comes some one."

He looked earnestly at the person who had caught his eye, and then continued:

"Yas, I knows thet pretty hat o' hers."

"It are ther leetle gal, an' she are alone."

He fairly capered with delight at this discovery, and then kept his eye upon the coming horsewoman.

Her pony was coming on at a long canter, and she sat upright in her saddle, her face pale, yet fearless.

Turning from the direct trail she came on toward the timber, bringing her pony down to a walk as she neared the spot of her rendezvous with the desperado.

"Waal, leetle gal, yer is gamer than a hungry wolf!" cried Bad Ben, as she rode into the timber and drew rein near the spring.

"And you are as vicious as a hungry wolf."

"But I do not fear you and have come to keep my promise," was the bold reply.

"Did yer keep yer promise, tho'?"

"Am I not here?"

"Yas."

"Then why ask if I kept my promise?"

"Did yer bring ther money?"

"I did."

"And yer gold trinkets?"

"You see that I wear my earrings, you have my watch and chain, and see, here are my rings."

She drew off her gloves as she spoke, revealing two very pretty little hands, and upon several of her fingers were rings of considerable value.

"Wa-al, you is a honey, an' ef yer is engaged ter some fine caballero, I will leave you the engagement ring."

"No, I am not engaged."

"Will be soon, I guesses, fer yer hain't ther kind o' gal thet ther fellers will let alone."

The girl laughed lightly, and made no reply, while the desperado said:

"Waal, chuck off ther rings an' ther ear-bobs, fer I don't want ter lose no time."

"Take the gold first."

"Whar is it?"

"In that saddle-pocket."

The fellow stepped to the side of her horse, and unfastened the flap of the saddle-pocket, and saw within a buckskin bag which was filled with gold.

"Thar is five hundred pesos thar?"

"Count them yourself and see!"

Dead-Shot Dandy's Double.

The man placed his hand upon the bag to take it out, but found that it was fast in some way, so took both hands.

As he did so, a revolver muzzle was thrust into his face, while the silvery voice of the maiden said firmly:

"Bad Ben, I want you! Up with your hands or I pull trigger!"

"Wolves and coyotes! Gal, what does yer mean?"

"Just what I say, you villain! Up with your hands, or you die!"

He glanced up into her face and saw that she meant every word she uttered, and promptly he raised his hands above his head.

"Clasp your hands together!" came the next order.

Sullenly the desperado obeyed.

With her disengaged hand then she took a lariat, which hung at her saddle-horn, and slipped the noose over his arms to the elbows, drawing them tightly together.

Then coil after coil was wound around the wrists and arms until the man was a prisoner, and wholly at her mercy.

"Gal, is this a joke? Yer don't mean yer is in yarnest?"

"I do, in dead earnest, as you will see."

"Yer has broke yer word ter me."

"I have not."

"Yer said yer w'u'd come here an' give me ther money an' ther trinkets, 'cause I war so good an' let yer go."

"I said no such thing."

"Them lips is too purty ter tell lies."

The maiden again broke out in a silvery laugh, but said:

"I do not tell you a lie. I told you I would meet you here and bring the money you demanded, along with my jewelry. I have done so and hence have kept my word. But I said nothing about letting you quietly rob me, and I did not then intend to submit to it in silence. My pistol was out of order yesterday, or I would have turned upon you then; but now I have you safe."

"What does yer intend ter do with me?"

"Give you up to the officers of the law in San Antonio."

"They'll hang me."

"Doubtless, and you deserve it."

"I never did nobody no harm."

"Oh, I know you, for I took your picture mentally yesterday, and describing you, found out just who you are."

"An' who are I?"

"Bad Ben."

"Lordy! yer hes got me down fine, but yer hain't got ther heart ter see 'em hang me."

"No, for I shall not go to the hanging; but knowing of your many red deeds, I would do wrong to release you."

Were you but a common robber I would disarm you and let you go, but now you will have to suffer the penalty of your crimes.

"Come, move off for San Antonio, and go on foot, for I will lead your horse, as I fear to trust you on his back."

"I'll not stir one step, gal."

"You must."

"I says I won't."

"Do you wish me to kill you?"

"Yas, fer it are better ter die now, from a bullet than ter go to San Antonio an' git my neck stretched," was the dogged reply.

The maiden was in a quandary, for what to do she did not know.

To shoot the man she would not think of such a thing, unless he attempted to attack her or escape.

She knew well that he deserved death for his many crimes, and she also knew that he would soon be disposed of if she took him to San Antonio.

She would not shrink from her duty though, and yet how was she to get him there?

"You will not go, you say?" she suddenly asked, as a thought flashed through her mind.

"Not a step."

"We shall see then."

She made a noose in the end of the lariat she held, and threw it about his body.

Then she made it fast to the saddle-horn and said:

"Come, Mischief, you will have to drag this gentleman to San Antonio and I will ride his horse."

She sprung from her saddle as she spoke and approaching the splendid animal of the desperado, pulled up the lariat-stake and leaped into the saddle.

"Come, Mischief," she called out to her horse, and the pony, well-trained and obedient, walked toward her.

From side to side Bad Ben bounded, but the mustang moved on after its pretty mistress, pulling the ruffian along in spite of his fierce struggles, while the maiden, pistol in hand, rode in advance, a beautiful guard over a particularly ugly human.

CHAPTER III.

DEAD SHOT DANDY, THE SCOUT.

THE violent struggles of the desperado to free himself, and to hang back from going to San Antonio, could not last long, as the maiden captor of the villain well knew.

But she was unprepared to see him, when his strength failed, suddenly throw himself at full length upon the prairie and allow the pony to drag him.

"If I allow my heart to soften toward him, he will give me more trouble, so I'll let Mischief drag him awhile, and he'll soon get tired of it," she said to herself.

But just then she saw a horseman coming toward her at a rapid gallop.

Quickly she halted, calling to her pony to do the same, while she raised the rifle of the prisoner, and which was hanging to the saddle-horn, not knowing but that she might have to face a foe.

The appearance of the horseman was assuring, however.

He was mounted upon a jet-black steed, that came on at a swinging lope, with arched neck and graceful carriage that seemed neither to mind the weight he bore, or the distance he had traveled.

His saddle and bridle were of Mexican make, and were very rich in workmanship, being bespangled with silver pesos, and buckles.

The rider was dressed in the Mexican garb, and an elegant suit it was, excepting that he wore his pants stuck in high and handsome cavalry boots, the heels of which were armed with massive gold spurs.

About his waist and half hidden by his short velvet jacket, was a sash in which were a pair of revolvers, and at his back hung a repeating rifle, and to the saddle-horn a lariat.

The face of the horseman was certainly very fascinating, darkly bronzed in complexion, with large eyes, most expressive, and a regularity of features that was almost feminine.

His hair fell in clustering curls upon his broad shoulders, gauntlet gloves covered his hands, and a broad-brimmed sombrero, embroidered in gold, and encircled with a band of links of the same precious metal sat jauntily upon his head.

Raising his sombrero as he approached, he gazed with some surprise upon the maiden and her prisoner, and said politely, and in a rich voice:

"Can I aid you, *senorita*? for you have a very unruly customer there."

"Thank you, *senor*, I shall esteem it a favor as I confess he is more than I can manage."

"It does not look so, as he appears to be your prisoner."

"Yes, I captured him a while ago," and the maiden laughingly told the story of her adventure the day before and her determination to capture the wretch.

"Ah! you say that he is known as Bad Ben?"

"Yes, *senor*."

"I recognize him, now that I get a look at his ugly face."

"Yas, an' I knows you too, Dead Shot Dandy ther scout," growled the prisoner.

"Then you know that you will have to obey, for I will stand no trifling."

"Now, *senorita*, what are your orders?"

"I wish the man to get up and go with me to San Antonio."

"He will do it of course."

"In course I won't," was the sullen reply.

"Permit me to ask you to ride your horse, and I will place him on his."

The maiden sprang to the ground, and held the rein of the desperado's horse, while the handsome man whom Bad Ben called Dead Shot Dandy, raised that worthy in his strong arms, as though he had been a child, and threw him across his saddle.

A lariat then bound him firmly to the saddle, and giving the bridle-rein of the animal to the maiden, he said pleasantly:

"There is your prisoner, *senorita*, and I think you will have no more trouble with him."

"I thank you, sir," and the young girl vaulted into her saddle, while the scout also mounted and rode by her side on toward San Antonio.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCOUT'S DAUGHTER.

THE sun was fast setting as the maiden, her prisoner and her escort, rode into the Plaza of San Antonio.

Her coming as she did created great excitement, for she was known to many of the citi-

zens, as a dashing, daring girl, who preferred to ride over the prairies to moping in the hacienda where she lived.

Bad Ben, the desperado, was also known, and many had been the efforts to capture him, especially since some deadly work of which he had lately been guilty.

A reward for his body, dead or alive, had been offered, and this had stimulated a number of brave men to go on the hunt for him.

Now he had been captured by a girl, and all listened breathlessly while she sat upon her horse telling her story to the officers of the law.

"You are entitled to the reward, *senorita*," said the marshal.

"I do not care for the reward, and in fact would not accept it, so leave it in your hands to divide among the very poor people of the town," was the answer of the maiden.

"You are most generous, *senorita*, but you will at least accept the horse of Bad Ben, for he is a superb animal," urged the marshal.

"Thank you, *senor*, I will take the horse, and if you will unsaddle him I will lead him to my home."

"Permit me to do that much for you," said the scout, and he seized the bridle-rein of the desperado's horse, and rode off with the maiden, amid wild cries to hang the prisoner.

"They will give him no trial, I fear," said the young girl, addressing the scout, as the two rode away together, and the yells of the infuriated crowd grew wilder and wilder.

"I do not think that he deserves trial—see! they have seized him by force from the marshal, and are going to hang him!"

"Oh, this is terrible!"

"Come, *senor*, let us ride on and get beyond hearing of their voices."

She urged her pony into a rapid run as she spoke, and the scout kept close to her side, the desperado's horse running along without any trouble, as though glad of the change of owners.

"There is my home, and, after your kindness to me, I must ask you in, and Don Sebastian Brent will welcome you, for I reside in his family," and she pointed to a handsome hacienda just beyond the limits of the town.

"No, thank you; I have a duty to perform which admits of no delay."

"But another time I hope to have the honor of meeting you, *senorita*."

"I will be glad to see you, *senor*, whenever you can call."

"Perhaps you can tell me of the one I seek. She is at the convent, I believe."

"Yes, if you seek any one there I can tell you of her, for only a few months ago I left the convent, having completed my studies, and Don Sebastian Brent, an old friend of my father, made me a member of his family."

"What is the name, please, of the lady you would find?"

"*Senorita Lulu Dale*."

"Indeed! Then, *senor*, you need go no further to find her, for *I am Lulu Dale*."

"You surprise me, and give me pleasure too, for I came hither to seek you, *senorita*."

"Ah! sir, you speak in such a serious tone I fear you bring me ill-tidings."

"Speak, I implore you! Do you come from my father?"

"I do, lady, come on his account," was the response.

"Has harm befallen him?" and reining in her horse, she gazed into the face of the man before her with earnest entreaty.

"Senorita Dale, I am the bearer of sad tidings for you."

"Speak! what of my father, for he is all I have in the world to hear sad tidings from."

"Your father, senorita, is dead."

"Dead! Oh, Mary, Mother, have mercy upon me!"

As the prayer broke from the white lips, the beautiful head was bent forward and rested in the hands, while the poor girl burst into tears.

The scout made no effort to check her grief, but sat in silence gazing upon her.

After a few minutes she raised her head, and said earnestly:

"Ah, sir, do not think me a child not to control myself; but I have gone each afternoon for a week to meet my father, whom I expected about this time.

"Long years ago, when my poor mother died, he placed me at the convent, and twice each year has he visited me, and a dear, generous father has he been to me.

"Now you tell me that he is dead, and that I must look for him no more."

"Yes, senorita, your father met his death at the hands of a foe."

"Killed?" gasped the young girl.

"Yes, he was shot down while he was engaged in his duties as a scout at the fort."

"His duties as a scout, senor?"

"Yes, senorita."

"Is there not some mistake?"

"None."

"My father, senor, was a ranchero."

"Your father was William Dale, was he not?"

"Such was his name."

"He was an American?"

"Yes."

"And married your mother in Mexico, for she was the daughter of a Mexican Don?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then there is no mistake, for your father was not a ranchero, but a scout at Fort Blank, and there he was known as Bronze Bill."

"Indeed! why, senor, my father led me to believe that he had a small cattle-ranch long miles from here."

"Perhaps he did so, senorita, to keep you from anxiety, knowing that you would fear for him in leading the dangerous life of a scout."

"Perhaps so, senor," said Lulu Dale in a dazed kind of a way.

"Such was doubtless the case; but a scout he certainly was, and he served under me at Fort Blank, where I am chief of scouts.

"Dying he left his money in my keeping to give to you, and I have come to fulfill my pledge to him, and now turn over to you this package of bills, which contains something over three thousand dollars, as you will see by counting the money."

"Senor, there is some strange mystery in all that you tell me."

"Not in the least, senorita.

"Your father was a scout, and the money which he has saved up he sends you here.

"It was all that he had, and I will ask you to allow me to go on with you to the hacienda and receive from you a receipt for it."

"Certainly, senor; but oh! what a bitter blow you have given me."

She moved on once more toward her home, and the scout entered with her and again told to the inmates of the hacienda the sad story which he had made known to the maiden.

"The senor speaks the truth, Lulu, your father was a scout, but, for some reason wished the secret kept from you, and I never told you that he was not a ranchero as he pretended to be," said Don Sebastian Brent.

"I cannot understand it all," said Lulu.

"Well, my poor child, do not worry about it, and remember now that I am to be your father," said the kind-hearted ranchero, and then he begged the scout to become his guest.

But Dead Shot Dandy declined, saying that he was forced to return in all haste to the fort, and receiving from Lulu a receipt for the money paid her, he departed from the hacienda, and rode back to San Antonio.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS.

It was the day after the capture of Bad Ben, the desperado, by Lulu Dale, and the excitement had not yet died away in San Antonio, for it was a most extraordinary occurrence to have a young girl bring in a desperate man as a prisoner, and without aid.

The story had gone from lip to lip, until Lulu Dale was a heroine, and the authorities had called upon her in a body to thank her for her daring work, and to offer the reward due her.

She modestly heard their words of praise and firmly refused the reward, telling them, as upon the day before, to distribute the sum among the poor.

Bad Ben, once he got into the hands of his foes, was given little time for repentance, for a lariat was put around his neck, and when Dead Shot Dandy crossed the Plaza, after leaving the Brent Hacienda, he found the desperado swinging in mid-air, and dead.

A word to his horse, and the animal bounded forward; and as he passed the tree, thirty feet away, the scout raised his revolver, a flash illumined the gathering gloom, the report followed, the lariat was severed, and with a heavy thud the body struck the earth.

Wild hurrahs and bravos rung out from the crowd, at this sample of deadly marksmanship.

Raising his broad sombrero, the scout rode on and disappeared from sight across the Plaza.

Late that night a small party rode into the Plaza and halted at the main hotel of the town.

There was an officer in the full uniform of the United States Army, several cavalymen, and an ambulance.

Procuring quarters at the hotel, the officer sought rest, avoiding the crowds that still lingered in the saloon.

But the next morning after an early breakfast, he started off for the convent, and after

making some inquiries there of the mother superior, returned to the hotel and spent an hour engaged in business with some merchants in the town.

Then he mounted his horse and rode away in the direction of the Brent Hacienda.

Don Sebastian was seated upon his veranda enjoying a cigar and saw the officer approaching.

"Ah! I am to have a guest; but I do not recognize him," he said, rising to greet his visitor.

"Is this Don Sebastian Brent?" politely asked the soldier.

"Yes, senor."

"My name is Edgar Leighton, senor, and I am paymaster at Fort Blank, and visit your house to see a lady who I learn is your guest."

"Whatever your motive in coming, Mr. Leighton, you are welcome," said the hospitable ranchero.

"Thank you, senor; but I bring sad tidings for Miss Lulu Dale, as she is the one to whom I referred."

"Yes, now my adopted daughter, since we learned yesterday of her poor father's death."

"Ah! she is aware then that her father is dead?"

"Yes, Mr. Leighton, the sad news has been told her."

"I am glad that I have not the painful task of making it known to her, Don Sebastian, for it is a painful thing indeed to have to tell ill-tidings."

"But may I ask to see her? for I have to pay into her hands some money left her by her father."

"Indeed? this will be a surprise, for she was paid yesterday three thousand and odd dollars, left her by her father."

"This is remarkable, sir, for I knew not that Dale left more money than I hold of his."

"Well, Lulu is in luck, that is certain; but here she is."

Just then the maiden came out upon the veranda.

Her face was pale and her eyes red from weeping; but she was calm, and bowed low at the introduction of Don Sebastian to the young officer.

"Lulu, Mr. Leighton tells me that he has come to pay to you some money left by your father," said the don.

Lulu looked surprised, but said:

"Indeed, sir, I received yesterday a sum of money from a gentleman who said it was the inheritance left me by my poor father."

"So Don Sebastian has told me; but may I ask the name of the person?"

"Certainly; it is Duke Decatur."

"Duke Decatur!" exclaimed the officer.

"So he told me; but I heard him called yesterday Dead Shot Dandy."

"Ha! this is remarkable, Miss Dale, and when I tell you all you will not wonder at my astonishment."

"Oh, sir! what mystery is this surrounding my poor father's death?" cried Lulu, with quivering voice, while Don Sebastian looked anxious, as though dreading evil.

"I will tell you all that I know, Miss Dale,

and then we may together be able to clear up the mystery," answered the officer.

"Do so, I beg you," and Lulu and Don Sebastian waited most anxiously for the officer's story.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS SCOUT.

"LET me begin my story, Miss Dale, by telling you that the three years that I have been at Fort Blank, I have known your father as one of the best scouts in the command, and also a hunter for the post, than whom no one was able to bring in better game, and in larger quantities than he did."

"He was a little peculiar in his way too, and I remember that twice each year he asked for a couple of weeks' leave, and where he went no one knew."

"That was when he came to see me, while I was at the convent," said Lulu.

"Little over a year ago there came to the post a man of striking appearance, fascinating manners, and the best shot I ever saw, while he was also a dandy in his dress almost."

"He joined the scouts' force, and in a short time became their chief, and the boys gave him the name of Dead Shot Dandy on account of his fancy attire and deadly aim, though he called himself Duke Decatur."

"Every one liked him, and no one dreamed wrong of him, though all felt that there was some mystery hanging over a man, who, refined, educated, and apparently well-supplied with money, could be content to live the life of a scout."

"Some weeks ago your father was out hunting, and when going to a spot in the chaparral known as Padre's Rock—"

"Yes, I know the place, and it took its name from the fact that a priest was murdered there some years ago," said Don Sebastian.

"Yes, sir; that is the place, and there Bronze Bill, as Miss Lulu's father was known to the men, saw Dead Shot Dandy, engaged in conversation with a horseman supposed to be one of the band of Rio Grande Marauders."

"He accused him of talking to the Marauder, and was instantly shot for his words."

"Oh, my poor father!"

"Dead Shot then rode away, believing that your father was dead, and another scout, Monte, by name, passed Padre's Rock, and discovered the dying man."

"My father?"

"Yes, Miss Dale."

"He at once made him as comfortable as he could and rode at full speed to the fort, returning with an ambulance and surgeon, and Captain Cecil Lorne."

"To this officer Bronze Bill made his dying confession of who had shot him, and gave into his hands the power to draw the money due him, exacting from Captain Lorne a promise to deliver to you in person your inheritance, with the blessing he left with it."

"And Captain Lorne found the task too irksome, so imposed upon you the painful duty?"

"Ah, no, Miss Dale, for he is not the man to neglect a trust."

"But he was severely wounded soon after in

a fight with Indians, and, as duty called me to San Antonio, he asked me to act for him."

"I humbly crave his pardon," frankly said Lulu, and the officer continued:

"The strangest part of all this was just as we had all decided that Dead Shot Dandy was indeed a traitor, he arrived at the fort accompanied by Miss Marie Du Barry, whose life he had just saved from a drove of wild mustangs, which her own wild animal she was riding had run away with her to join.

"And more, there was a youth with him, the sole survivor of a train which had been made up of his own family, and was going West.

"Their camp had been attacked by the Marauders of the Rio Grande, and all slain, the boy escaping through being absent at the time searching for his pony that had strayed.

"A sister of the boy was also believed to have been made captive by the Marauders, as her body could not be found among the other dead; but afterward all believed that she had fled from the sickening scene out upon the prairies and perished, or been killed by wild beasts."

"Poor, poor, girl," said Lulu, touched by the sad fate of the unfortunate maiden.

"The boy," continued Edgar Leighton, "was brought by the scout, Dead Shot, to the post, and being a superb cornetist, young as he was, Colonel Du Barry made him the regimental bugler.

"By his story, and that of Dead Shot Dandy, had he been the slayer of your father, at Padre's Rock, it would have been next to impossible for him to have found the boy at the time he did."

"Was it possible, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Dale, but only with a superb horse, and some desperate reason for riding there."

"The Boy Bugler stated to the court-martial that the horse of the scout arrived at the scene of the massacre comparatively fresh, and this saved him upon the plea of mistaken identity, upon the part of your father."

"And the scout Monte, who saw him near Padre's Rock?" asked Lulu.

"He was supposed to have been also mistaken."

"It does not seem possible that two such men as Dead Shot Dandy can be upon the Texas prairies, for he certainly is a remarkable looking personage," said Lulu.

"I am willing to admit now, Miss Dale, that Dead Shot is the only one.

"But I did not believe him guilty, and had an idea that Monte swore against him because he did not like him, and wished to step into his shoes as chief of scouts.

"After his release he was deprived of his rank, and Monte received it, and yet he did such splendid service against the Indians that every one felt that he had been wronged.

"The other day he led the command against the red-skins, and after a signal victory for the troops, Dead Shot could nowhere be found, and we believed him to be a prisoner.

"His best friend was Benito, the Boy Bugler, and he, with Captain Lorne and Keno Kit, a scout, started to search for Dead Shot, and it

was then that the captain was wounded and the trio were forced to return in all haste to the fort.

"Then I started for San Antonio, and, along with the money I had for you, I had some Government funds, and other sums for purchases for various parties at the post.

"When going into camp at noon, day before yesterday, we were attacked by a band of Marauders.

"Resistance was useless, and I had to surrender all to the robber leader, who knew just what I had in money.

"I begged him to spare the sum I held in trust for you, and his strange reply was to the effect that he would rob me of it, but not you.

"Now I can understand his words, for he has given you the money."

"I received the money from the scout, Dead Shot Dandy, sir."

"And when the Marauders, who were masked, rode away, a limb of a tree, knocked the sombrero of the leader from his head.

"With it went the mask, and I recognized Dead Shot Dandy as the Marauder chief!"

"This is startling," exclaimed Don Sebastian, while Lulu went on then to tell the paymaster just how she had met Dead Shot Dandy and the aid he had rendered her.

"And he has paid to you the money?"

"He has."

"Yet I hold the sum for you."

"How so, sir, when you were robbed of it?"

The officer's face flushed, while he answered:

"I could not think of allowing you to be the sufferer, Miss Dale, through my being robbed, so I drew on my own account this morning, through some merchants in San Antonio, to pay it to you."

"You are a noble man, Mr. Leighton, and I thank you most warmly.

"But the man, from all accounts, who killed my father, has become conscience-stricken, and, after robbing you of my inheritance, has paid it to me, so I will release you by giving you a receipt in full for the sum you held for me, and I appreciate all you have done to serve me."

"And in return, Miss Dale, I will say that, as we now know this traitor scout in his true colors, I will do all in my power to bring him to justice for the crimes he has committed."

After a few words more upon the subject, the paymaster arose to depart; but Don Sebastian insisted upon detaining him as his guest while he remained in San Antonio, and the two gentlemen rode into town together, for Edgar Leighton had some business to attend to.

Arriving at the Plaza, they heard the story of the scout's shot that cut Bad Ben's body down, and at once men were sent through the town in search of the daring man.

But the day passed away and not one person could report having seen the scout after he rode away from the Plaza, and whither he had gone was a mystery which no one could solve.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMPACT.

WITH its camp of hangers-on, sutler stores, and rendezvous of trappers, hunters and train-

men, outside of its own troops, Fort Blank was quite an important post on the Texas border.

Its destinies were ruled by Colonel Du Barry, a genial gentleman and a gallant soldier, and the idol of the commander's heart was Marie, his beautiful daughter, who owed her life on two occasions to Dead Shot Dandy, the one-time chief of scouts, but who had turned out to be a traitor, it was said, to those who had revered and trusted him.

There were officers at the fort besides the colonel, who had their families with them, and thus quite a little social gathering was there.

Then there was the handsome, brave, rich young soldier, Captain Cecil Lorne, upon whom the colonel had his eye as a hoped-for son-in-law, but who yet seemed not to have made any great impression upon Marie Du Barry's heart, nor, in fact, did he appear to be in love with her, though the two were stanch friends.

When trouble came upon Dead Shot Dandy both Cecil Lorne and Marie Du Barry remained his friends, and the maiden had warned him of the charges against him when she had been saved by him from the wild herd of mustangs, and urged him not to go to the fort.

But he had not heeded her warning, and the result of his trial, for the murder of Bronze Bill, the reader has heard from the lips of the paymaster.

Then there was at the fort a scout whose name no one knew, other than that he answered to the rather peculiar cognomen of Keno Kit.

No better scout was on the prairies, and no truer friend to Dead Shot Dandy, and he had boldly defended him against the slurs of Monte, the man who had stepped into the shoes of the alleged slayer of Bronze Bill.

This Monte was a superb-looking man, with fiery black eyes, long raven hair and a form of magnificent physique.

In fact he was very much like Dead Shot Dandy in form, though a person gazing into the face of each to select a man of noble soul, would have chosen the one who was afterward proven a traitor to the Government he served.

There was one other at the fort who needs more than a passing notice, and that is the boy whom Dead Shot had found at the scene of the massacre of all he had loved.

The scout was seeking a clump of timber, to camp for the night, when upon his ears burst the notes of a bugle.

He at once thought that a company of cavalry was encamped there; but soon the notes ran into melody after melody, played with a pathos and skill that held the scout spellbound.

At last they ceased, and there, among his dead, pouring forth his grief in music, he found the desolate boy.

And that Boy Bugler would hear no word against his friend, and, in spite of all reports, remained true in his belief of his innocence.

When Dead Shot was supposed to be a prisoner to the red-skins, Benito, the Boy Bugler, Keno Kit and Captain Cecil Lorne had boldly gone into the Indian country to try and rescue him, and the result was that they failed to find him, and the captain came back severely wounded in the arm.

Upon that expedition Benito had greatly dis-

tinguished himself, and became a hero at the fort; but he longed to have his friend Dead Shot return, so that he might learn how his *protege* was behaving, for he still believed, as did also Keno Kit, that the scout would return.

Then it was that Edgar Leighton started upon his trip to San Antonio, and Keno Kit was his guide.

And Keno Kit it was whom the paymaster sent back to the fort with the news of the robbery by the Marauders, while he continued on to the farm, as the reader knows.

Like a bombshell fell the tidings upon all, when Keno Kit told who it was that had said he was Captain Alvarez, the chief of the Marauders, and was discovered, by the knocking off of his sombrero and mask, to be none other than Dead Shot Dandy.

Closely had the colonel questioned Keno Kit upon the subject, and all he could say was:

"My eyes hain't wrong, col'nel, an' therefore I b'lieve thet it war Dead Shot, fer I seen him."

"I will send the escort that Mr. Leighton asks, to meet him, Keno Kit, and Monte will go, so you can rest after your hard ride," said the colonel.

"I hain't tired, but I is hurt, fer I w'u'dn't hev believed it ef I hadn't seen him," said Keno Kit, and he went straight to Dead Shot Dandy's cabin to find Benito, for the Boy Bugler and the scout lived together.

Benito had already heard the news and was pacing to and fro with pale, anxious face.

"Come in, Keno Kit, and tell me with your own lips if you saw what the soldiers say you did," said the boy, nervously.

He was a handsome, well-formed boy of fifteen, with fearless eye, a resolute mouth, and a manner that was very attractive.

"Leetle pard, does yer 'member when I were playin' keerds with Monte a bullet came flyin' inter his cabing an' grazed his cheek?" asked Keno Kit.

"Yes."

"They said it were fired by Dead Shot."

"So they did."

"Waal, altho' his were ther only rifle thet bullet w'u'd fit, I said it were a durned slander ag'in' him."

"I know that you did, Keno Kit, and it was."

"And yer 'members when I went with Monte an' some o' ther boys on a scout a short while ago?"

"Yes."

"Thar were a shot fired at Monte while he were lightin' a cigar with a match?"

"Yes, the bullet cut the cigar from between his lips."

"It did, pard Beeneeto, an' all as saw ther flash o' ther rifle said it was Dead Shot."

"Yes."

"I seen him, too, but when he said he hedn't shoot ther shot I believed him."

"Well, Keno Kit?"

"Ag'in, yer 'members when he comed inter ther fort one night an' told ther col'nel thet he hed kilt two Marauders, an' got some things off of 'em sich as jew'ry an' sich, which he said were yourn fer they hed took it from yer camp ther night o' ther massacree, yer knows them two

dead bodies he says he left thar c'u'dn't be found?"

"True."

"And Monte said thet he hed been one o' ther band as robbed yer camp, an' got conscience-struck an' give up ther things, tellin' a lie about killin' ther two Marauders?"

"Yes."

"Waal, all these things I didn't believe, leetle pard, ag'in' Dead Shot Dandy; but now comes ther tug o' war."

"Well, Kit?" anxiously asked the boy.

"Leetle pard, *I seen him with my own eyes.*"

"You mean when Paymaster Leighton was robbed?"

"Yas."

"Might you not have been mistaken, Kit?"

"Waal, I might hev been, but I'd sw'ar it were Dead Shot Dandy."

"Ah, me! this is terrible, Keno Kit, and looks bad for poor Dead Shot."

"But I believe he is innocent," firmly said the boy.

"I'm with yer, leetle pard, ef yer says so; but I hes hed enough ter shake up my friendship a leetle."

"Still, I'll wait fer more afore I decides ag'in' Dandy."

"Bless you, Kit, for those words," and the youth grasped the hand of the scout, while he added:

"You are the only real pard I have in camp, now that Dead Shot has gone; but we'll be true to him, won't we, until we know that all is true that they say of him."

"Yes, leetle pard, we'll be true, an' thar is Keno Kit's grip on it, Boy Boogler, an' don't yer fergit it."

Thus was the compact formed between the Boy Bugler and his pard, Keno Kit.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETURN.

SOME days after the compact was formed between Benito and Keno Kit, a cavalcade arrived at the fort escorting an ambulance, in which were several wounded men.

It was the return of Paymaster Leighton, and the party sent by Colonel Du Barry to act as a guard.

The paymaster at once sought the commandant, and the report he had to make was soon known over the fort.

It was to the effect that at night, when encamped, a party of horsemen had dashed into their midst, killing and wounding right and left, and the ambulance, loaded with the valuable purchases of the paymaster had been robbed of all it contained.

The mounted robbers were none other than the Marauders of the Rio Grande, and all of them were masked with the exception of their leader.

His face was not hidden, and every trooper and scout whose eyes fell upon him had at once recognized Dead Shot Dandy.

Such was the report the paymaster had to make of his return march from San Antonio.

And more, he had also to tell that he had

seen Lulu Dale, the scout's daughter, and how Dead Shot Dandy had paid to her the money left by her father.

"That man is a wonder to me, Lorne," said Colonel Du Barry, addressing his favorite captain, who was recovering rapidly from his wound.

"To me, also, sir, if he is really the traitor all claim him to be, but yet, I must confess, I do not yet believe all I have heard against him."

"But Leighton could not be mistaken, surely."

"One would not think so, sir; but I still lean toward believing in Dead Shot as a square man."

"And so does my daughter Marie, while that gallant Boy Bugler swears by him, and that it is a case of mistaken identity."

"And so does Keno Kit, colonel, and he saw this robber chief."

"True, and I wish the mystery was solved; but, as it is, now that the Marauder captain, be he Dead Shot Dandy or not, has twice attacked a Government train, it is my duty to act promptly, and I shall send Lieutenant Lancaster at once upon his trail."

"If Lancaster is unable to catch him, colonel, I will try my luck as soon as I can take to the saddle, and then if we find Dead Shot the guilty man they claim, he will hang for it."

"Assuredly— Ha! what noise is that in the fort?"

The colonel stepped quickly to the window as he spoke, and from whence he could gain a view of the massive entrance to the fort.

He saw Lieutenant Lancaster and a file of men standing just inside the stockade, and a number of soldiers had gathered around, as though moved by some great excitement.

Then his eyes fell upon the cause of all this seeming confusion, and he beheld a horseman approaching the stockade.

The one whom he saw was riding leisurely along, and was wholly unaware of the excitement in the stockade.

"Great Heaven! it is Dead Shot!" cried Colonel Du Barry excitedly.

"No, it cannot be," was the answer of Cecil Lorne, who was considerably excited.

"Yes, and he is riding as coolly toward the fort as though we were ready to receive him with open arms."

"But Lancaster is ready with a file of men to put him in irons immediately upon his arrival."

A few minutes afterward, Dead Shot Dandy entered the stockade.

His black horse seemed to have been driven hard, and his face was pale and somewhat haggard, while his usually elegant attire, was blood-stained and dirt-soiled.

But he had the same fearless, defiant look, and gazed upon the soldiers filing upon each side of him with considerable surprise.

"What does this mean, Lieutenant Lancaster?" he sternly asked.

"It means, Decatur, that you are under arrest," was the reply of the young officer.

"Ah! what crime has been trumped up against me now?"

"That you will soon know, sir; but now I demand the surrender of your belt of arms."

"Certainly," and they were handed over without a word.

"Now, sir, dismount."

The scout obeyed in silence.

"Hold out your hands please."

This order was also obeyed, and irons were clasped upon the wrists, while the face of the prisoner grew white as that of a corpse.

"Sergeant, lead that man to the guard-house, and see that he is held secure."

The sergeant saluted, and Dead Shot Dandy was marched away between the double file of soldiers.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DRUM-HEAD COURT-MARTIAL.

It was now evident that whatever sentimental feelings were entertained by Ben to, the Boy Bugler, Keno Kit and several others in regard to believing in the innocence of Dead Shot Dandy, against all facts, they were not felt by those before whom he was to appear as a prisoner, charged with murder and robbery.

In fact many could understand why it was that so many times the Marauders had moved just at the right time to capture valuable trains, and always been able to avoid the troops.

Some one had been suspected of giving information to them, but who, no one could find out.

That a spy was in the camp was very evident, yet no one had suspected Duke Decatur, the Dead Shot Dandy, of being that spy, until the dying confession of Bronze Bill brought him before their eyes as his murderer.

In trying a man thus accused no time was to be lost, and a drum-head court-martial was at once ordered for the following day.

The hour of trial came round and the prisoner was led before his accusers.

He was pale, yet calm, and seemed not at all afraid of the fate which he felt must be his, from all the charges against him.

The first witness called was Captain Lorne, who went over the testimony given upon the former trial, regarding the dying confession made to him by Bronze Bill (William Dale) who had said that he was ruthlessly shot down by Dead Shot Dandy.

Then followed those who had witnessed the shot fired into the cabin of Monte, the chief of the scouts, and the bullet was produced.

It fitted exactly the rifle of Dead Shot, and no other weapon in the fort.

Then too the timber from whence it had been fired was too far off for any other rifle to risk a shot that far.

Next came the witnesses of the shot fired at Monte, and knocking away his cigar, and all who saw the horseman, lighted up by the discharge of the rifle for an instant, said that it was Dead Shot Dandy.

No, there was one who said:

"It hed ther look o' Dead Shot, I admits, but I might be mistaken, for with all ther folkse in ther yarth, it w'u'd be strange ef some of 'em didn't look jist like t'others."

This was from the lips of Keno Kit.

Then followed Monte as a witness, and he plainly asserted that he had dug the bullet out of the adobe wall of his cabin, where it was fired through the open door, and that he felt convinced that Dead Shot Dandy had fired it.

He also went on to prove that where Dead Shot Dandy had said that he had killed two Marauders in the timber and found upon them the things taken from the Dewhurst family which had been massacred, that the bodies of the alleged slain men could nowhere be found.

Also, Monte asserted that he had met Dead Shot Dandy near Padre's Rock the evening on which Bronze Bill had been shot, and half an hour afterward had found the man dying.

Then came Lieutenant Edgar Leighton, the paymaster, and in a few straightforward words he told his story of the robbery of himself, and the knocking off of the hat and mask which revealed who the leader was that called himself Captain Alvarez, the Marauder.

The story of his visit to San Antonio and what had followed there, the aiding of Lulu Dale in carrying in her prisoner by Dead Shot, his giving her the very money which he examined and knew to have been that which he had been robbed of, and afterward his dashing upon their camp upon the return to the fort, were all told in distinct tones that showed the paymaster's confidence in the prisoner's guilt.

"Was the prisoner masked in his second attack upon you?" asked Colonel Du Barry.

"He was not, sir, though his men were."

"Did you hear him speak on that occasion?"

"I did, sir."

"You know that the prisoner has a ringing voice of peculiar tone?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did the voice of the Marauders' leader strike you as compared with the prisoner's?"

"I had not thought of that, Colonel Du Barry, but now I remember that the voice of Dead Shot then was deeper than ordinarily."

Then Keno Kit was recalled and told his story in his quaint way, adding:

"I don't do no sw'arin' that it were Dead Shot; but ef it wasn't then he were as much like him as twin peas, tho' I do now remembers the'r voices were dif'rent."

All of the other scouts and soldiers examined told the same story, that Dead Shot was the man who had attacked them at the head of the Marauders.

With all of this damning testimony, it seemed that the prisoner had not the show of a chance for life.

"But he was asked by Colonel Du Barry:

"Now, Duke Decatur, what have you to say against these charges?"

"I am not guilty, sir," was the calm reply.

"You deny that you killed Bronze Bill?"

"I do, sir."

"And that you saw Monte near Padre's Rock the afternoon on which the scout was killed?"

"I did not see him there, sir, and I left him in camp when I departed."

"You deny having fired the shot from the timber that so nearly killed Monte in his cabin?"

"I do deny it, sir."

"You disavow having fired the shot at him the same night, when he was lighting his cigar?"

"I never shot at him in my life, Colonel Du Barry."

"You assert this on oath?"

"Certainly, for had I shot to kill him, he would not be sitting there now to lie against me."

"And what have you to say about the two men you killed in the timber, as you reported?"

"That I did kill them."

"And found upon their bodies the things taken from the Dewhurst family, and now in the possession of Benito, the Boy Bugler?"

"I did take those things from the bodies of the two men."

"And what became of the dead men?"

"That mystery I am unable to solve, sir."

"Do you also deny, prisoner, that you halted Paymaster Leighton on the trail to San Antonio?"

"Emphatically I deny it, sir."

"And that you robbed him?"

"I did not see him, sir."

"Also you deny having given to the daughter of Bronze Bill the money which was taken from Paymaster Leighton?"

"Never in my life, sir, did I see the daughter of Bronze Bill."

"You also disavow having attacked and robbed Paymaster Leighton upon his return to the fort?"

"I do, sir."

"Then you admit the truth of not a single charge against you?"

"Not one."

"This is strange, prisoner."

"I admit that appearances are terribly against me, sir; but I am not guilty."

"Where were you after the last attack upon the Indians in the mountains?"

"I dogged their steps on their retreat, until they sent a special force after me."

"Then I retreated, the twelve warriors pursuing, and in a fight with them I killed two of their number, after which I showed them the speed of my horse, and they turned back, knowing how useless it was to follow me."

"And where did you go then?"

"I met a train whose guide had been killed, and I led it on to the upper country."

"And then?"

"I started for the fort, but struck a trail which I believed was made by the Marauders, and scouted on it for a day or two."

"And then?"

"I returned to the fort, sir, for both my horse and myself were pretty badly used up, as in the Indian fight I received several slight flesh wounds."

"And this is all you have to say?"

"All, sir."

"Your word is against the testimony of many, and those who have been your friends."

"I know it, sir, and I do not censure but one of them for what they have said, as I believe that they labor under a case of mistaken identity."

"But one you do censure?"

"Yes."

"And that one is—"

"Monte, the Mexican."

Monte laughed lightly at this, and Dead Shot continued:

"He is my foe, and some day you will find it out."

"I have no more to say, sir, and am ready for sentence."

"And your sentence, Duke Decatur, is that you be hanged for your crimes, at sunset, one week from to-day," impressively said Colonel Du Barry.

The prisoner never flinched, but said in his calm way:

"Colonel Du Barry, I do not fear death; but I beg of you, for the sake of the service which you will admit I have rendered the Government, that you will allow me to be shot, and not die at the end of a rope."

"As a common murderer he deserves hanging," boldly said Monte, the chief of scouts.

"Silence, sir! how dare you speak thus," sternly said Colonel Du Barry, turning upon Monte with flashing eyes, while Keno Kit said:

"Yer struck ther wrong trail thet time, Pard Monte."

"Prisoner," continued Colonel Du Barry, "I change your sentence from hanging to shooting."

"You are to be led forth by a file of soldiers, and shot, just one week from to-day."

"I thank you, Colonel Du Barry, and you will find that I will meet death fearlessly."

The prisoner was now led away in double irons, and taken to the log cabin which served as a guard-house, where he was chained to the floor, and left alone with his thoughts, while a sentinel was placed in front of the door, with orders to admit no one to see him without an order from the commandant.

CHAPTER X.

KENO KIT AND HIS BOY PARD.

"LEETLE pard, yer heard ther sintince in ther case," said Keno Kit, as he visited Benito in his cabin, the night following the condemnation of Dead Shot Dandy.

"I did."

"Does yer think it were squar?"

"I think it was intended to be just, considering the testimony, Keno Kit; but I believe that all who testified were mistaken as to the one they saw being really Dead Shot."

"Thet idee kinder haunts my mind."

"But what is we men goin' ter do about it?"

"I'll tell you what I intend to do about it, Kit," said the boy abruptly.

"What are that?"

"I intend to save the life of Dead Shot."

"Tain't so easy did."

"Are you afraid to help me in it?"

"Does I look skeery, pard?"

"No."

"Does I act skeert?"

"No."

"Waal, I ain't skeert in ther least."

"Then we can get him out."

"Thar must be no killin'."

"There shall not be, for that would only get us into trouble and ruin all."

"Fact."

"Have you any plan to suggest, Kit?"

"Ther sentinel hes ther keys o' his irons?"

"Yes."

"He walks up an' down afore ther door, an sometimes he sits down on ther bench."

"So I noticed to-night."

"Thar hain't no one else in ther guard-house now?"

"Fortunately for our plan there is not."

"Ther nearest anybody are ter ther guard-cabin are a hundred and fifty feet."

"True."

"Waal, my plan are thet you rides ther black horse of Dead Shot out o' camp ter-morrer, for he gived him ter yer, an' yer sails off arter some wild ponies."

"Catch a good one, an' then return an' tell how ther black got away from yer; but don't yer tarn up until sunset, so nobody will be able ter go huntin' for him."

"Yer kin leave ther black over at ther edge o' ther chaparral, whar ther old military camp was, an' which are jist three miles from ther fort."

"Yes, Kit."

"Then, when night comes on, I'll dress up in some sojer clothes, fer I kin git a sergeant's suit, an' as I hain't got no beard ter speak of, I'll git thet false ba'r thet Capt'in Lorne wore at ther masked fandango some time ago, an' put it on, fer I seen it hangin' up in his room near ther window, an' I kin reach it an' git my grip onto it."

"I'll walk bold as a billy-goat up to the sent'nel, an' jist grab him by the throat, so he can't squeal, an' yer know thar hain't but one man in these camps as kin loosen my grip."

"And that is Dead Shot?"

"Yas, he kin loosen ther grip o' any man I ever seen."

"Waal, I won't hurt ther sent'nel, but I'll jist hev you round ther corner o' ther cabin, dressed as one o' ther old squaws over in ther Hanger-on Camp, an' you kin tie ther sojer tight as wax, an' I'll gag him."

"Then we kin take ther keys, open ther door, onlock ther irons, an' jist tell Dead Shot ter skip out o' ther fortifications, fer he kin sling a lariat onto a limb o' thet oak near ther wall, an' git over beautiful."

"You kin tell him whar his horse is, an then we kin shuck our duds an' go up round head-quarters an' hang about until arter ther relief-guard goes round an' ther diskiv'ry is made."

"Keno Kit, your plan is splendid, and we will carry it out; but the weapons of Dead Shot Dandy are in the colonel's quarters."

"I would like to have him git 'em, Pard Beeneeto, but I does think he'll hev ter be satisfied without 'em, an' I hes enough an' ter spare."

"Yes, we cannot do more, for to take his arms would bring suspicion upon me, as I have the run of the colonel's quarters."

"An', pard boy, yer must be pertick'ler not ter be away in ther evenin' longer than yer kin help."

"Hev ther squaw's rig ready, which I hev in my traps, fer I hev played squaw myself in my time, when goin' inter Injun camps, an' yer kin slip it on an' all kin be did in ten minutes, an' you be back ag'in an' blow thet boogle o' yourn fer all it are worth."

"I will, Kit, and you must show up at head-quarters, too, so as not to be missed."

"But they may get some soldier into trouble."

"Yas, waal, thar is plenty more in ther army, ef they hangs one fer ther settin' o' Dead Shot free."

"I would confess that I did it, before I would see a man hanged, Kit."

"Waal, it depends on what they intended doin' with him."

"How do you mean?"

"Ef they was only goin' ter put him in ther guard-house fer awhile, all right."

"Ef they jist puts him on double duty, all right."

"But if they suspect a man or order him out to be shot?"

"Then we'll step to ther front an' save him."

"Good! Now I am ready for the work, as I suppose they will not blame the sentinel for being overpowered."

"They w'u'dn't ef they knew thet my grip were upon him," returned Keno Kit; but with no idea of boasting of his strength.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOY MUSTANGER.

BRIGHT and early the following morning, Benito, the Boy Bugler was up, preparing for his wild-horse hunt.

He asked permission of the colonel to go out upon the prairie for a chase of wild mustangs, and that officer said:

"What, Benito, do you intend to try wild-horse catching, too?"

"Yes, sir, I wish to see if I can do so."

"Well, you are a dead shot, a good fencer, an excellent horseman, throw the lariat as well as any man in camp, can play the bugle beautifully, and, I do not doubt, will soon become the champion wild-horse catcher."

"Thank you, sir; but I wish to catch a faster horse than my pony, for he is a little slow."

"Then you better ride a fast animal to do the work on."

"How would my daughter's horse, Equine King, suit you, for she would lend him to you I know?"

"He is not trained for the work, sir."

"Ah! I forgot that, but Monte has an animal that is."

"I am not very friendly with Monte, sir, and would not ask him."

"Why not take Death Shot's black, which he gave you, Benito?" asked Captain Lorne, who was present.

"True; why he is the very horse for you, and the fleetest animal on the prairies," put in the colonel.

"I did not wish to ride him, sir, until after—after—"

"Ah! I understand you; until after poor Dead Shot's death."

"Well, do as you please, Benito."

"I will take him, sir," and Benito turned away, and soon after rode out of the fort for his chase of wild mustangs.

He certainly was in luck, for ere he had gone half a mile a large herd was spied driving along at a rapid pace and heading north, the

very direction which the boy wished them to go.

Instantly he gave the word to the black, and away he went at a terrific pace.

Glancing over the herd, Benito picked out the animal he wanted.

It was a long-bodied, high-headed roan stallion, apparently in a gallop, while the greater part of the herd were at a run.

Pressing him, the boy saw him bound away at a pace that showed his speed.

That the herd was strange in that part of the prairie was evident, for the leader was heading in a direction that would bring him upon a deep ravine.

It was a split in the prairie which could not be crossed for a mile on each side of the point toward which the herd was driving.

"Now is my chance," cried Benito, and he pressed on the harder after the magnificent roan.

On dashed the herd, and keeping back the boy Benito urged them forward at their utmost speed, and saw that the roan stallion had taken the lead and still kept up only a sweeping gallop, which showed he had not let himself out as he could do.

Soon the ravine came in sight and there was halting, swaying, scattering to right and left, and then Benito dashed to the front.

The roan had halted in amazement and was snuffing the air with distended nostrils and head up.

Just then, as he was about to dart away, the lariat was thrown.

It was a long throw and barely reached; but over the shapely head it settled, and the well-trained black throwing himself back quickly upon his haunches, the wild mustang was thrown upon the prairie with stunning force.

Quickly Benito had sprung from his saddle and was at his side, thrusting upon him a bow-stall.

Then, unloosening the lariat about his throat, he allowed the gasping animal to rise.

But the daring boy was on his back, and instantly, like an arrow from a bow, and with a wild snort of rage and fright, the untamed beast bounded away.

A call to the black, and he came following behind at a pace that kept him near.

The herd had scattered to the right and left, and were flying in two gangs across the prairie, and up and down the ravine.

Toward one of these bands the roan mustang headed, but he was quickly checked by a jerk upon the bow-stall.

Then began a struggle for mastery between the boy and his equine captive.

And long it lasted, until the roan and his rider were both well-nigh exhausted.

But the horseman triumphed over the brute, and the mustang, tamed by the master hand, was ridden toward the point where Benito wished to go.

That was the place of an old encampment, in the edge of the chaparral which led on to Padre's Rock.

Luxuriant grass was there in abundance, and plenty of water, so that Benito soon had Dead Shot's black unsaddled and lariatd out to rest

and feed, while he hopped his roan beyond chance of escape.

Lying down to rest, Benito sunk to sleep, and the day was drawing near its close when he awoke.

His roan had made the best of the matter by eating the grass at his feet, and the black was thoroughly rested.

Watering the latter at the spring, Benito again staked him out, and then mounted the roan, untied the halter, and let him bound away at full speed with him, guiding him in the direction of the fort.

Into the stockade he dashed just at sunset, and all were delighted with his splendid capture.

"You don't mean you lost the black, Benito?" said Colonel Du Barry.

"The last I saw of him, sir, he was a long way behind me, and I had my hands full with the Colonel here, for I have named him after you, sir, with your permission."

"Certainly, my boy, and at the christening I'll present him with a Mexican saddle and bridle," answered the kind-hearted colonel, while Keno Kit remarked:

"Pard Beeneeto, thet animile are a beauty an' no mistake.

"But don't feel bad about ther black, fer sometimes a horse gits tangled in his bridle, an' ef he don't come in ter-night we kin look him up ter-morrow fer yer."

Then, as the two went off together, the scout continued:

"Yer hes done prime, boy pard."

"And did you get the uniform?"

"Yas, and yanked the beard out o' ther winder, you bet.

"I tell yer, ther plot are workin' fu'st-class."

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESCUERS AT WORK.

BENITO was very tired after his severe struggle with the roan mustang; but he went up to headquarters, as soon as it was dark, and never appeared in better spirits.

After the guards were posted at eight o'clock, he got his cornet out and began playing, and never before did he play better, all thought who heard him.

Keno Kit was also loafing about, smoking his pipe, and chatting now and then with an officer.

Presently he walked quietly away and Benito saw him disappear in the direction of the soldiers' quarters.

He had not been gone long before the boy laid down his cornet, with the remark:

"She needs cleaning, captain, so I'll get my box and clean her up."

"Then you'll see the difference."

Leaving the cornet on the bench, on the broad headquarters piazza where he had been seated, Benito walked quietly away.

Straight to his cabin he went, and all was darkness there.

But as he stepped within, Keno Kit whispered:

"I is here, pard, an' done up like a bold soger, you bet."

"Good! Now where is my rig?"

"Right thar, an' ef it don't make a squaw out o' yer, I lies."

"I made yer a head-gear o' scalps, an' in ther box yer finds on ther table are paint fer yer face an' hands, so jist jump inter ther rags in no time."

Benito rapidly found the articles referred to, and a couple of minutes was sufficient for him to thoroughly disguise himself.

"Is yer ready, boy pard?"

"I am."

"Then jist skip."

"For the guard-house?"

"Yes."

"I will go to the rear of it?"

"Yes, an' when yer hears me come up, jist sail to ther front."

"Where are the ropes and the gag for his mouth?"

"Here they is in my hand."

"Now I am ready."

"All right, sail out, Boy Boogler."

Benito left the cabin and cautiously made his way to the guard-house, arriving in the rear of that gloomy abode in less than ten minutes after he had left headquarters.

The sentinel was pacing to and fro, little dreaming of the plot to free the prisoner, and that he was then closely watched.

Soon, from his place of lookout, Benito saw the form of Keno Kit coming through the darkness.

So upright did he walk, so soldierly did he look in the shadowy light, that Benito feared that it was not Keno Kit, his pard.

Straight up to the sentinel he walked, receiving a salute, for the stripes upon his arms were visible to the soldier, though he failed to recognize him.

Seeing that he was a stranger, the sentinel was about to halt him, when, with the spring of a panther, Keno Kit was upon him, his hand upon his throat while he said in hoarse tones:

"Resist and you die!"

At that moment the sentinel saw the form of a squaw glide up, and instantly the musket was wrenched from his hands, and he found himself in a clutch he could not shake off.

Nor could he cry out, as the pressure upon his throat prevented that.

Half a minute of time was sufficient for the rescuers to bind and gag the sentinel securely, and then he was taken around the cabin out of sight, and the keys were unloosened from his belt.

Unlocking the guard-house the daring allies stepped within.

All was darkness, and Keno Kit called out in a whisper:

"Pard!"

No reply, and again he called:

"Pard Dead Shot!"

Still no answer.

"Waal, he do sleep sound fer a man as is goin' ter be shooted; it hain't like him ter sleep thet way."

"Keno Kit, Dead Shot has gone!" cried Benito.

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Whar?"

"Who knows?"

"Waal, it are so, fer here are his irons, an' he hev skipped."

"Who has aided him, Kit?"

"Somebody as has been sooner than we is."

"Well, he is gone an' I am glad of it, though I would like to have been the one that aided his escape, but it seems he has friends here after all."

"So it do."

"Well, let us return to headquarters, so as not to be suspected."

"All right, boogler pard."

Quietly the two left the cabin, the sentinel was brought back and placed before the door, which they had locked, and tied to the logs with his musket at "shoulder arms," so that any one seeing him when passing would suspect nothing wrong.

Then the two returned to the cabin, threw off their disguises, and Keno Kit went to replace the uniform and false beard, while Benito washed his face, and seizing his cornet-case, hastened back to headquarters, not having been half an hour absent.

And there he played his cornet, with Keno Kit and others seated out upon the piazza listening, until the relief guard went round and the startling news was made known that Dead Shot Dandy had escaped.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ESCAPE.

DEAD SHOT DANDY sat alone in his prison of logs.

He heard the hum of the distant camps, the singing of the birds and the steady tread of the sentinel before the door.

These were the sounds that reached his ears, while his eyes fell upon bare walls of rudely hewn logs, a table, a cot, a camp-stool and no more.

At last there fell into the room a tiny ray of light.

It was a golden beam of sunlight cast by the orb of day just as it was going down beyond the horizon.

"It seems like a ray of hope amid the gloom that surrounds me," murmured the prisoner.

Then the door was opened and a soldier entered with the supper for the prisoner.

No word passed between the two, the meal was placed silently upon the table and then Dead Shot Dandy was alone once more.

Darkness now fell upon the scene, and the prisoner sat by the table, his head buried in his hands and his supper untouched.

Suddenly he heard a peculiar sound.

It seemed like the gnawing of a rat, yet from whence it came Dead Shot could not tell.

Now and then it would cease, and then again he would hear it.

What could it mean?

At last the sound changed to one that was grating, and Dead Shot looked upward, for there it seemed to be.

He knew that the roof was whole and firm, and yet now he distinctly saw light shining through.

And on the roof he now placed the sound.

Instantly he discovered the cause.

"That brave boy is trying to rescue me," he said.

Still the grating sound continued, unheard by the sentinel who passed to and fro before the cabin.

"He may yet hear it.

"I will sing to drown the noise, though he works almost noiselessly, and if he is discovered the guard will kill him."

Then, in a rich tenor the prisoner broke forth in a lively melody that caused the sentinel to mutter:

"That man has more pluck than generally falls to human beings.

"He sings well too; but his voice will be hushed before long, and it's a pity, for I hate to see a brave man die, even if he be a bad one."

Thus mused the sentinel, little dreaming that upon the other side of the roof a person was working like a beaver to prevent the prisoner from dying.

And on sung Dead Shot, running from one air into another until at last he beheld a square opening in the roof, fully large enough for him to go through.

Then the space was darkened, and a human form was visible, relieved against the clear sky.

The next instant a human being stood by his side, having come down by means of a rope.

"Mr. Decatur, I have come to save you," said a low voice.

In spite of himself the scout very nearly uttered an exclamation aloud when he heard that voice.

"You here, to save me?" he cried in a whisper.

"Yes."

"I am sorry you came, for I must remain and meet my fate."

"You must do no such silly thing, for after I have risked so much to save you I will not hear to your refusing to go."

"But—"

"I will hear of no excuses.

"You are sentenced to die in five days, and die you will have to if you remain here.

"I believe that you are innocent, and once free from here you can prove that you are not the guilty one it is claimed that you are."

"God bless you for those kind words."

"Then you will go, for I have the keys which I took from the colonel's desk."

"You have risked much to save me."

"Then lose no time but go at once."

"But who has helped you?"

"No one, for I dared not trust any one, fearing that I would get them into trouble."

"And you have done all this to save me?"

"Yes, and hope that you will not delay now. I bored into the roof with an auger, and then used a small saw to open a space. The rope is made fast to cross-beams, so will hold your weight."

"You go first then."

"You will follow?"

"At once."

Up the rope hand over hand went the daring rescuer, and was soon out upon the roof.

Then the scout followed, and he saw that the

rope had been made fast to a tree growing in the rear of the log-cabin and overhanging the roof.

Quickly yet noiselessly the rescuer slipped into the branches of the tree and dropped upon the ground, the scout following closely.

"I was unable to get a horse for you, Mr. Decatur; but the chaparral is not far away, and once there you can defy pursuit, knowing the country as you do.

"Besides, you will have a long start. Here are your arms for you."

"Oh, how good you have been to me!"

"Do not speak of it. Here also is your lariat, and you can scale the stockade at the large tree yonder.

"Now go, and if you are innocent, prove yourself so."

"If I am guilty?" he asked in a low tone.

"Then go your way with your own conscience, and that will be punishment enough for you in my mind."

"It will."

"Good-by."

He held out his hand and it was firmly grasped by his rescuer, who then motioned him away.

Following slowly and keeping the scout in sight, the one who had risked so much and accomplished all that had been intended, saw him throw his lariat at the naked branch of a tree and quickly run up to the top of the stockade.

Then a sigh broke from the lips of the rescuer, who at once ran nimbly in the direction of the officers' quarters, disappearing from sight in the shadow of a large cabin.

A moment after that same person sunk down, as though overcome with fatigue and excitement, upon a lounge and cried earnestly:

"Thank God I have saved him."

The speaker appeared to be a youth, and was dressed in a soldier's uniform.

But as the light fell full upon the face it revealed the pale, beautiful countenance of Marie Du Barry.

Half an hour after she had cast aside her uniform, and in her own attire was seated upon the piazza of her own home, listening to the Boy Bugler's music, while her father sat near by smoking a cigar in silence, and little dreaming of the bold part that his lovely daughter had played, to save the life of Dead Shot Dandy the condemned scout, who was then going across the prairies at a brisk walk in the direction of the chaparrals where he knew there was safety for him from all pursuit.

CHAPTER XIV.

KENO KIT'S SACRIFICE.

THE excitement that existed in Fort Blank, and its adjoining camps was intense, when it became known that Dead Shot had escaped.

How he had done so the hole in the roof showed conclusively, and yet there was a deep mystery about it.

When the relief guard went into the cabin the sentinel on duty there was discovered in a very disagreeable and embarrassing situation.

He stood up against the walls of the guard-

house, firmly bound, and his musket was secured to his side as though on duty.

His story was told to Colonel Du Barry, before whom the sergeant at once brought him.

"Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?" sternly asked the colonel.

The man's mouth was by no means in good talking condition, after his having been gagged so long; but he blurted out:

"I'll tell you, sir, I'll tell you."

"That is what I wish you to do, sir, and lose no time about it."

"Well, sir, I was pacing my beat, after the prisoner had stopped singing."

"Singing?"

"Yes, sir, he was singing awful gay for a long time."

"Then he stopped, and presently I saw a soldier coming toward me."

"Who was it?"

"That I do not know, sir; but he wore a sergeant's stripes, sir, and had a long beard."

"What man answers that description, Lorne?" and Colonel Du Barry turned to Cecil Lorne, who answered:

"Corporal Dunn has a long beard, sir."

"But this man was not the corporal, sir," said the guard.

"And you do not know who he was?"

"No, sir."

"This is very strange, my man."

"I know it, sir; but he came right up to me, and seeing that I did not know him, I was about to halt him, when he jumped upon me and took me by the throat, at the same time telling me he would kill me if I resisted."

"Were you not strong enough to resist him, for you are a powerful man in appearance, Richards?"

"I was like a baby in his hands, sir, and then came an old Injun squaw."

"A squaw?"

"Yes, sir; one of them that lives over in the camps."

"Which one?"

"Lor', sir, they are all alike."

"That is true."

"Well, what did the squaw do?"

"She helped tie my hands and feet, sir, and shoved the gag in my mouth."

"See here, sir; she cut my lips, opening my mouth, and you can just see that the man burt my throat," and the soldier exhibited the results of Keno Kit's grip upon him.

"Yes, you were not handled with gloves; but I am glad it was no worse, my man."

"Now tell me what was then done?"

"They took me around the corner of the cabin, sir, and laid me down, taking my keys from me."

"Then they departed for a few minutes, but returned and tied me up as the guard found me."

"And you did not see them bring the prisoner out?"

"No, sir."

"And know nothing about the hole sawed in the roof?"

"No, sir."

"Nor heard the sawing?"

"No, sir; but I am just a trifle deaf."

"Ah!"

"Well, my man, I think you have overdone your part, for I believe you guilty."

"Guilty, sir?"

"Yes, for you had the only keys, excepting those in my desk, that unlock the guard-house and the prisoner's irons."

"You overdid the matter in allowing the prisoner to cut that hole in the roof, and then tie you up as the guard found you."

"Ah, sir, I am not guilty."

"Have you searched this man, sergeant?"

"No, sir."

"Do so."

The soldier was searched and in his pockets was found a large roll of bills, amounting to several hundred dollars.

"Ah, this looks bad."

"Where did you get this money, my man?"

The soldier hesitated, and then said:

"I found it, sir, in the Indian camp at the last fight."

"I do not believe you, Richards, and it pains me to say so, for you have been a good soldier."

"Sergeant, lead him to the guard-house, and if the prisoner is not captured I will take the responsibility of having Richards shot, for his crime is worse than desertion, for he has accepted a bribe to set free a man who has cost the Government many lives and thousands and thousands of dollars."

The soldier turned piteously toward his commander, but was sternly ordered off, and the sergeant was just putting the irons upon him when Keno Kit stepped into the room.

"Col'nel, them irons belongs ter my wrists, an' not ter his'n."

"What do you mean, Kit?" asked Colonel Du Barry, starting to his feet in surprise, while all gazed upon him in astonishment.

"I means thet ther soger did find ther money in ther Injun camps, as others did too, fer I seen 'em with it, an' he didn't git it ter let Dead Shot go free."

"How know you this, Keno Kit?"

"From hev'n set Dead Shot free myself."

"What?"

"Fact."

"Do you mean it?"

"Waal, I'll confess thet I stole Sergeant Bodine's uniform an' hat, gobbled up thet false beard thet hangs in ther capt'in's room, an' walked up beautiful to the soger."

"He were goin' ter bayonet me, I guesses, but I are a trifle quick in movin' an' so I jist got my squeezer onter his throat an' tied him."

"But who was the squaw that aided you?"

This was a poser for Keno Kit, and he was silent.

"What squaw was it that aided you?"

"Lordy, col'nel, yer hain't g'wine ter visit my sins 'pon thet ole Injun gal?"

"I must know her name."

"Hain't I enough ter suffer?"

"No, you must tell me who aided you."

"Wa-al, col'nel, fer ther fu'st time in my life, I disobey orders, so jist sot Richards loose an' take me out an' shoot me ef yer wants ter, for I sot Dead Shot free, an' I'm durned ef I tells who helped me to do it."

CHAPTER XV.

A FAIR PRISONER.

"AND do you mean, sir, that you set Dead Shot Dandy free?" sternly asked Colonel Du Barry.

"I means jist thet, col'nel, so put ther irons on me, fer thet sent'nel hain't ther one ter punish," was the frank reply of Keno Kit.

"Sergeant, set Richards free."

This was done, and then Colonel Du Barry continued:

"Richards, I ask your pardon for my suspicions of you; but it looked so thoroughly against you, that—"

"It looks ag'in' Dead Shot, too, col'nel, but I believes he hain't guilty," put in Keno Kit.

"Silence, sir!"

"I wish the scout could have been proven innocent, as you have Richards. Now you can go, and to-morrow I shall promote you to be ordinance sergeant, in place of poor Burns who was killed the other day. I do this to make amends for the wrong done you."

Richards bowed his thanks and waited to hear what Keno Kit would say now, for he said:

"I'd like to know, sir, if you please, about the hole in the roof."

"True; how came that there, Keno Kit?"

"Col'nel, I hev confessed to you that I set Dead Shot free."

"I are ther man thet seized Richards heur, and I are willint ter take ther consequences."

"More, I does not intend ter say."

"But you can tell why you made that hole in the roof of the guard-house, when you had the keys to let the scout out of the door?"

"Waal, yer see I hed diff'rent plans fer freein' him, an' when I got ther keys, I didn't need ther hole in ther roof fer him."

"I see."

"Well, sir, do you know that you have taken your life in your hands in setting free the Marauder chief?"

"Col'nel, it were Dead Shot I sot free."

"And he was found guilty of being the Marauder captain."

"It did look thet way, sir; but he hain't been execooted as sich yet, an' maybe he won't."

"But you have set all discipline at defiance in releasing him."

"I are here ter take ther consequences," was the cool reply.

"And you shall, for I do not intend that you shall escape, and, as I said to Richards, so I say to you, that you shall be shot for your act."

"You knows best, col'nel."

"Pardon me, Colonel Du Barry, but Keno Kit is not the only guilty one, for I aided him," and Benito stepped into the room.

"You?" gasped the colonel, for he had learned to love the Boy Bugler as though he were his own son.

"Yes, sir, for I am the *old squaw*," and Benito smiled as pleasantly as though he had been playing a joke in impersonating an old squaw.

"Benito Dewhurst, this is a most serious matter for you," sternly said the colonel.

"It was more serious for poor Dead Shot,"

was the answer of the boy, though not with any desire to be impertinent.

"You are young, deeply attached to Dead Shot Dandy, and hardly knew the gravity of the crime you were committing, so—"

"You are mistaken, Colonel Du Barry, for I fully knew all that I did, and I expect my punishment to be the same as that which you threaten Keno Kit with, for I am equally guilty."

"Boy pard, why in thunder didn't yer keep yer mouth shet, fer they'd never hev diskivered thet old squaw ter be you."

"You should not suffer alone, Keno Kit."

"Waal, we went inter ther big eend o' ther horn tergether, an' we comes out o' ther leetle eend side by side," said Keno Kit.

"Sergeant, put that boy in irons, too, for he is also guilty," sternly said Colonel Du Barry.

"One moment, sergeant."

The speaker was Marie Du Barry, and she stepped between the sergeant and the Boy Bugler while she took from the hands of the former the iron handcuffs which he held.

No one had suspected her presence until she had glided into the room.

"Marie!" cried the colonel, as she approached.

Quickly she clasped the irons upon her own wrists, and holding out her little hands toward her father, she said, in calm, distinct tones:

"Colonel Du Barry, now you have the guilty one."

"Marie, for God's sake what does all this mean?" cried the mystified colonel.

"It means that I set Dead Shot Dandy free."

From every lip came an exclamation at this bold assertion, while Keno Kit said:

"Waal, thet do beat all, an' no mistake."

"Don't it, boy pard?"

But Benito's gaze was fixed upon the beautiful girl, as she stood boldly before her father.

"Are you mad, child?" gasped the colonel.

"No, sir."

"Then why do you make such an assertion?"

"Because it is true."

"This man says that he set the prisoner free, and Benito has confessed to aiding him in the act."

"Now you say you are the guilty one."

"Permit me to explain, father, and then, as a soldier's daughter, I am willing to suffer punishment, if so you will, with Keno Kit and Benito."

"Then explain at once."

"You know that I have never believed Dead Shot Dandy, as the scout is called, guilty of the charges against him?"

"Yes, you have so foolishly said."

"You will also remember, father, that he has twice saved my life?"

"I do remember, my child," and the voice of the kind-hearted father trembled as he spoke.

"Owing him my life, and, in my heart believing him innocent, it was not in my nature to see him perish."

"I therefore determined to save his life if in my power."

"To do so, I reconnoitered the guard-house thoroughly, and observed that a tree grew close to it in the rear."

"This was an aid to my purpose, and I se—"

cured a stout rope, an auger and a saw for my use.

"Then I got Nita, my maid, to bring me the new uniform the regimental tailor had just made for Benito, and I dressed up in it—"

"Oh, Marie, my child!"

"I could not climb with skirts on, father," innocently said Marie.

Then she continued:

"I took the keys of the guard-house and manacles from your desk, recovered the weapons belonging to the scout, and set to work.

"I bored the auger-holes in the roof, and the saw did the rest.

"Then I fastened my rope to the overhanging limbs and went into the cabin, unlocked the irons that held Dead Shot in durance vile, and bade him fly.

"He at first refused; but I told him I believed him innocent, and to go and prove himself so.

"Then he departed, scaling the stockade wall, by aid of the oak-tree growing against it, and thank Heaven he is free.

"As for Keno Kit and Benito, they doubtless meant to rescue their friend; but I was before them," and Marie smiled.

"Durned ef yer wasn't ahead, an' ef yer hain't a glory, then set me down fer a weepin' liar," bluntly said Keno Kit, lost in admiration at the act of the brave girl.

"Marie, my child, I know not what to do, for you have been equally guilty with this man and boy."

"Permit me, Colonel Du Barry, to suggest that you forgive the trio, for Keno Kit and Benito intended releasing Dead Shot, and Miss Du Barry did so," said Captain Cecil Lorne.

"It will be said that I do so on account of my daughter."

"It makes no difference, sir, what is said, so that Miss Du Barry is not made to feel unpleasantly for acting from impulse that was right, to serve one who had saved her life."

"Then I will drop the matter here; but if such a thing occurs again in my command, I will punish the guilty one, be it you even, Marie.

"Keno Kit, you and Benito are discharged."

The two pards bowed and left the room, followed by the soldiers, and Marie remained alone with her father, who was certainly in no pleasant mood with her for her daring act.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PLEASANT SURPRISE.

I WILL now return to Dead Shot Dandy after he had thrown his lariat upon the naked limb of the tree growing near the stockade wall.

By this means he drew himself up into the tree, loosened the noose from about the limb, and then passing the lariat around it, lowered himself to the other side.

"I am free, and it will be a daring man that attempts to retake me now," he said, as he stood on the outside of the stockade wall.

But which way to go he seemed at a loss to decide for a moment or two.

"I will go to the chaparral, and once there I am safe.

"But it pains me deeply to give up my beau-

tiful horse, but Benito will treat him well, I know.

"Well, I can soon get another animal, and it will not be my fault if I do not get a good one.

"To the chaparrals I go then."

With this he set off across the prairie at a rapid walk, his belt of arms about his waist and his trusty rifle at his back.

A strange circumstance directed his steps toward the old encampment before referred to.

It may have been that he knew that the entrance to the chaparral was easiest from that point, and it may have been accident.

But certain it is that he went straight to the old encampment.

With no expectation of meeting any one there, he was not approaching with caution, but was brought to a sudden halt by hearing the snort of a horse.

"Ha! some one is there," he said.

Instantly he threw himself flat down upon the prairie, and thus lay listening and watching.

"Can it be that some wild mustangs are there?" he muttered.

For a long time he waited, twice hearing the snort of a horse again.

"Some Indian scout may be there, or it may be a Marauder."

For some time longer he remained quiet, and then he crept along toward the chaparrals, which arose dark and gloomy before him.

Nearer and nearer he went, circling around the old place of encampment, so as to gain the shelter of the chaparrals.

At last he gained their shelter and then, standing upon a slight rise of ground, he beheld a horse.

The animal had ceased feeding, and was standing with outstretched head, watching and listening, evidently having scented the presence of the scout.

"That is no wild horse," muttered the scout.

And creeping nearer to him he continued:

"He is staked out, and that proves that his master is near.

"But I need a mount, and I'll just borrow that horse."

Moving himself through the grass he approached to within a few feet of the animal and a low neigh greeted him.

Instantly he was upon his feet.

"By Heaven! it is my own beautiful Night Hawk!"

With these words he sprang to the side of the animal, who rubbed his nose lovingly against the broad breast of his master, whom he had without doubt recognized from the first.

"But what are you doing here, Night Hawk?"

"Perhaps Benito is here, for I left you with him, when they said I must die.

"Yet he would hardly camp this near the fort.

"No, some one must have stolen you, and if so, woe be unto that man.

"Where is he, Night Hawk?"

"Where is he, old fellow?"

Following up the lariat, at the stake, to his surprise Dead Shot Dandy found his own saddle, bridle and lasso, with his saddle-pockets filled with ammunition, evidently taken from his store at the cabin.

The haversack was also full of provisions, and seeing all this Dead Shot said:

"Well, whoever ran off with you, Night Hawk, prepared for a long trip, I am glad to see.

"Now, old horse, we will be off, and, mounted upon you I have no fear of capture."

So saying Dead Shot Dandy bridled and saddled the animal, and then led him to the chaparral's edge.

Leaving him standing, for he knew he would come at his call, he began a thorough search for the one he believed had stolen the horse, and whom he expected to find near by.

But his search proved fruitless, as the reader can understand, and mounting his horse he was about to ride away, when the fall of hoofs reached his ears, and he knew that several horsemen were coming rapidly toward him.

CHAPTER XVII.

LULU'S FLIGHT.

THE daughter of Bronze Bill was a noble-hearted, proud girl, yet she was slightly wayward at times.

She had never known a mother's love and care, and had grown up among strangers.

With Don Sebastian Brent and his wife she had been left in her early girlhood, by her father, and from thence she had become an inmate of the convent.

She had been a good student, obedient, yet she liked not the gloomy walls of her abode.

Her vacations were spent with the Brents, for Don Sebastian also had two daughters at the convent.

There it was that she had learned to ride like an Indian and shoot with deadly aim.

Upon leaving the convent she had gone again to the Brent Hacienda, by special invitation to make it her home.

Her father allowed her considerable money, sending her sums from time to time, and giving Mrs. Brent permission to dress her as she pleased.

That Bronze Bill did not make all his money in scouting and hunting seemed evident; but still Lulu believed her father a ranchero and so thought not of where her living came from.

Bronze Bill also told Don Sebastian to give her a pony, and to supply her with all the ammunition she chose to shoot away.

Lulu was certainly a very beautiful girl, and her manners were refined, although she was a dead shot, could catch a wild mustang and ride him bareback, follow a trail, and swim like a dolphin.

She was also as athletic as an Indian, could mount her horse from the ground, and a walk of miles never tired her in the least.

Don Sebastian really loved the girl, and hoped that his son, a young man of twenty-two, would make her his wife, although the boy was wild and dissipated.

The Don had come to Texas a poor man, married a ranchero's daughter, and thus gotten a start in life.

Becoming a ranchero, he had been dubbed "Don," after the Mexican way of addressing rich men, and his wife's maiden name, Sebastian, had been put before his own of Brent.

Shortly after the departure of Paymaster Leighton from the hacienda, a change came over Lulu Dale.

Of course it was attributed to her father's death, for she seemed ill at ease and moody.

Then she was wont to go off alone to ride more than usual, and she had gone shopping in San Antonio several times unaccompanied, while, when at the hacienda, she was always locked in her own room.

The Don had asked her what was the matter, and told her not to grieve too deeply for her father, as he would be all in all to her.

But she had made no reply.

Don Sebastian had also volunteered to take her money, which Paymaster Leighton had left her, along with what she had, and in all amounting to the snug little sum of four thousand dollars, and invest it all for her.

But she had told him she would wait awhile, until she had fully decided what would be her future plans, and she held on to her money.

One morning the Don arose early, as was his wont, and going out upon the piazza, found a peon there awaiting him.

The peon handed him a letter which he said he had been requested to give to him.

The Don recognized the peon as the son of a guide dwelling beyond San Antonio, and whom he knew quite well.

"Who sent this letter?" he asked, although by opening he could have discovered at a glance.

"The senorita, senor."

The Don looked over his shoulder, to see if his wife had heard, and then broke the seal.

"Why it is from Lulu!" he exclaimed.

Then he read half-aloud as follows:

"Tuesday night.

"SENOR:—

"I write these lines to you from my room in your house.

"They will be the last you will ever hear from the young girl, the orphan and the waif, for whom you have so kindly cared these long years in the past.

"To-night I leave your roof to seek my fortune elsewhere.

"You, I thank most sincerely for your kindness to me: but there are those toward whom I feel no thankfulness.

"It might have been that I would have gone on dwelling in your house for some time longer, had I not, while reclining in the hammock beneath your room window, overheard what passed between your wife and yourself the day after the departure of Lieutenant Elgar Leighton.

"I heard your wife ask you the sum left me by my father.

"I heard your answer.

"Then I heard her accuse you of having deceived her into the belief that my father was very rich and would leave me a large fortune.

"She believing me an heiress had fawned upon me.

"Finding me to be a poor girl, she hated me.

"As an heiress, she wished me to marry her son.

"As a pauper, she preferred that I should die first.

"Still she wished you to get from me the little money that my poor father did leave me, to cover up the gambling debts made by your son upon you in drafts.

"Then she wished to cast me off.

"You appealed to her in vain, for she threatened to turn me off then unless you got my money from me, and I heard your reply.

"It was to the effect that my father, and one other, knew of an act of yours in earlier years that would ruin you, and if you sent me off into the world alone, friendless and a beggar, that other would hold you to account for it.

"This silenced her, and I was endured.

"I held on to my money, made my arrangements, and now I leave you forever.

"Where I go it matters not, but I will tell you that I intend to avenge the death of my father.

"Let your wife and daughters say that I have gone to live with relatives in the States.

"Let your son so believe also, and this will satisfy those curious to know about me.

"To you I say that I go alone into the world, and am able to take care of myself.

"To you, also, I will say that I intend to avenge my father, and hold accountable the man who took his life.

"Again I thank you, and now bid you farewell.

"LULU DALE."

Such was the letter which Don Sebastian read, and it filled him with amazement, shame and sorrow, for at heart he was a good man.

Going into the mansion he read it to his wife, and a scene followed, for Mrs. Brent hated to give up the four thousand dollars which she knew Lulu had carried off with her.

"The girl is mad!" she cried.

"Yes, she is mad, and should be cared for."

"Go, Don Sebastian, go at once and pursue her and bring her back!"

And Don Sebastian went, and with a score of cowboys sought for her far and wide.

But it was of no avail, for Lulu had covered up her tracks too well.

But, though the Senora Brent had sent her husband after Lulu, she was not the woman to leave a stone unturned to capture the girl, so she at once sought one other to put upon the trail of the fair fugitive.

Who that other is, the next chapter will reveal.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOTHER AND SON.

As has been hinted, Henrico Brent, the son of Don Sebastian, was a very wild youth.

He had been reared with a fast lot, and ere he had reached his twentieth year, he had become an expert in gambling, while he had on several occasions "shot his man."

He was a handsome fellow, had pluck, was a good rider, a crack shot, but loved dissipation and a fast life.

The idol of his parents, he made them pay while he danced, and had gotten his father into financial trouble in helping him out of his debts.

His mother's dream had been that the fortune of Lulu Dale would make all things even, and hence she had urged that Henrico should make her his wife, and for this purpose alone, for the independent spirit of the girl had caused her to dislike her.

It was a sore disappointment to Senora Brent, therefore, when she found that Lulu was poor; but four thousand dollars in cash was not to be thrown away, and she therefore determined to get it at all risks.

The Don had started in pursuit of the girl, but the senora did not believe that he would make any effort to capture her,

So she determined to put one upon her trail that would.

That one was her son, Henrico Brent.

She knew that a peon had brought the letter to the Don, for he had told her so, and she knew who that peon was, and she would use him in furthering her plans.

She at once dispatched a messenger to the town for her son, and upon his arrival, angry at having been interrupted in a game of monte, and flushed with wine, she led him to her room.

"Well, mother, why am I sent for in such haste, he said in ill-humor.

"I will tell you, Henrico, if you will sit down."

"Well, I am down, and ready to hear; from the messenger I learned I was to come home in such haste, that I expected to find either you or the Don dead."

"No, I am well, as you see, and your father has gone in search of a fugitive."

"A fugitive?"

"Yes."

"Who do you mean?"

"One of our household has run off."

"One of the slaves?"

"No."

"Who in the name of the saints is it, mother?"

"Lulu."

The young man was upon his feet in an instant, his face white, while he asked:

"Who has she gone with?"

"Alone."

"Ah! that is better, but she has gone to meet some lover."

"This letter will explain all."

He seized the letter and read it carefully through.

Then said:

"Mother, I loved that girl and would have married her had she been the heiress we thought, but, as it is, let her go."

"No, no, my son."

"You do not want her back again?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Her money."

"Bah! she has but a few thousand."

"Are you aware that her few thousand will save to us our home?"

"What, is it as bad as that?"

"Yes."

"I thought the Don had plenty."

"He did have enough to live well on, but he has mortgaged his estates heavily."

"What in thunder did he do that for?"

"To pay your gambling debts, my son."

"Ah! I must have run in deep."

"You went in so deep that if five thousand dollars are not paid within the week we will lose our home."

"Caramba! is this so?"

"It is."

"And the Don has not got it to pay?"

"No."

"Nor can raise it?"

"He can raise but one thousand."

"Then all must go."

"You forget the girl's money,"

"How in the saints can I get that?"
 "I tell you that she has run off."
 "Well?"
 "She has it with her."
 "And has gone."
 "But she can be found."
 "How?"
 "I know the peon who was her guide, and his son, who brought the letter, can be bribed to take their trail."
 "And then?"
 "You can get the money."
 "Do you mean for me to take it from her by force?"
 "Oh, you are so stupid, Henrico."
 "I am your son, sweet mother."
 "Well, are you willing to get the money if I tell you how it can be done?"
 "Yes, if I do not have to harm the girl."
 "Bah! what care you for her?"
 "I do not war on women."
 "No, but you can shoot a man down without any compunction of conscience, though you shrink from taking a little gold from a girl."
 "I'll take the gold if I do not have to harm the girl."
 "It is mine by right, for having cared for her so long and tenderly."
 "Oh! I guess you feathered your nest, mother, out of the pin-money she got from time to time, and her father did not forget you, I remember."
 "Silence, you impudent boy."
 "I am dumb."
 "Now I will tell you my plan."
 "And if I get the money?"
 "Say that you won it, and then we will pay off the mortgage."
 "All right, mother, you propose and I'll dispose, so go ahead with your plot."
 In a low tone the scheming woman then made known her plot, and soon after Henrico Brent left the hacienda alone, well-mounted and armed, and wended his way to the humble ranch of the peon whose son had brought the letter sent by Lulu Dale.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLOT.

"PEDRO, is your father at home?" asked Henrico Brent, as he halted at the camp of the peon family, dwelling some miles from his home.
 "No, senor."
 "I am sorry, for I wished him to guide me to a good hunting-ground."
 "I can guide the senor," answered the youth, who was the same young peon who had brought the letter from Lulu to Don Sebastian.
 "Ah! I am glad to know that, for you will do just as well; so get your pony."
 "I will have to wait until my mother comes back, senor."
 "Where is she?"
 "At the town."
 "No, I have no time to wait."
 "Is there no one else at the camp?"
 "Only my little sister, senor," and the boy pointed to a child of eight, who was asleep in a hammock,

"Pedro, I wish to speak with you."
 "Yes, senor."
 "Do you see this purse?"
 "Yes, senor."
 "Here is fifty dollars, and if you tell me the truth, I will give it to you."
 "Oh, senor."
 "I mean it."
 "I will talk straight, senor," said the delighted boy, who had never dreamed of possessing so much wealth.
 "Where is your father?"
 "Gone on a hunt, senor."
 "Not alone?"
 The boy hesitated, and Henrico Brent said:
 "Remember you are to tell the truth to get the money."
 "Yes, senor."
 "Did he go alone?"
 "No, senor."
 "Who went with him?"
 "A young senor."
 "What?"
 "No, senor, it was the Senorita Lulu."
 "You just said that it was a senor."
 "She was dressed as a boy."
 "Ah! so far good."
 "Now, when did they start?"
 "In the night, senor."
 "From here?"
 "Yes, senor."
 "He was her guide?"
 "Yes, senor."
 "Where were they going?"
 "I do not know."
 "Do you tell the truth?"
 "I do not know where the senorita was going."
 "But do you know how far your father was going with her?"
 The boy was silent, and Henrico Brent held the gold pieces before his eyes.
 Still the boy spoke not, and the tempter dropped a twenty-dollar gold-piece.
 "Pick that up, Pedro."
 The boy obeyed, holding the gold lovingly in his hand.
 "Now, Pedro, how far was your father to go with her?"
 "To the old Mission beyond the river, senor."
 "And no further?"
 "No, senor."
 "Are you sure of this?"
 "Yes, senor, for the trail to the fort was open from there."
 "And at what hour did they leave?"
 "An hour before dawn, senor."
 "Then they have a long start; but which trail did they take?"
 "The one leading southwest, senor."
 "That does not take them to the old Mission, Pedro."
 "I know, senor."
 "Then why did they take it?"
 "To throw any pursuers off the scent, senor."
 "Ah! I see, and this will enable me to reach the Mission ahead of them," muttered Henrico. Then aloud he said:
 "Pedro, can you keep a secret?"
 "Yes, senor."
 "Why, you have just betrayed an important one to me,"

The youth hung his head, and said in a low tone:

"But you offered me gold, senior."

"Ah, yes, and for a larger offer you would betray me; but, Pedro, here is your gold, and the sum I promised you, so you had better hide it away as soon as I have gone."

"Now, if you do not tell any one that I have been here, or asked you about your father and the Senorita Lulu, I will give you as much more one month from to-day."

"Ah, senior!"

"But if you betray me, I will not give it to you."

"The senorita and father did not know I heard the talk, senior."

"Ah! and she paid him well as a guide?"

"She gave him fifty dollars, senior."

"Well, you will get fifty more in one month, if you do not betray me; and, Pedro—"

"Senior?"

"If you do, I shall kill you."

"I will not betray you, senior."

"See that you no not."

"All right, senior."

With this, Henrico Brent wheeled his horse and rode away at a sweeping gallop.

He held right out upon the prairies, where he knew some miles away his father had a herd of cattle, with several herders watching them.

At last he spied the herd, and a cowboy came riding toward him.

"Well, Dan, you are the very man I came to see."

"How can I serve you, Henrico?" asked the cowboy, who was a young man with a reckless face, by no means prepossessing.

"Dan, you have not forgotten that little affair in which I found you in the timber one day, bending over the tax-gatherer, whom you had killed, hoping to find upon him a large sum?"

"Henrico, why do you speak of that, after you have treated me so well for a year past and never referred to it?" said the cowboy, turning pale.

"Because I wish you to remember that I have not forgotten it."

"I almost hoped that you had."

"No, Dan, I could hang you on that; but I want you to do me a favor and keep your mouth shut about it."

"I will, Henrico."

"You know the nearest way to the old Mission some leagues beyond the river?"

"Yes."

"Your horse is fresh?"

"He is."

"Where are the other cowboys?"

"Off after game."

"Well, I want you to go to the Mission with me."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"And I do not wish you to remember that you have been there."

"All right, Henrico, I will do as you say; but what is up?"

"There is a party I expect to meet there, and I may need your aid, so I wish you to be along."

"All right, I am with you," and the two worthies started off together to carry out the plot against poor Lulu.

CHAPTER XX.

THE AFFAIR AT THE OLD MISSION.

"WELL, Antone, you say that we will see the Mission soon?"

"Yee, senorita, as soon as we rise yonder roll in the prairie."

The first speaker was Lulu Dale, disguised as a youth, and well-armed and mounted.

The one she addressed was an old peon, mounted upon a sorry-looking pony, but one that was far better than he looked.

It was several hours before sunset, and their course lay northwest, while they were following no trail, but striking across the prairie toward a given point.

A ride of a few hundred yards further, and they ascended the rise of the prairie, from which, as old Antone had said, they would have a view of the ruined Mission.

Before them a mile away was the river, and on its banks a league distant was the ruin.

"Ah! there is the place, and I will camp there to-night," said Lulu.

"You are plucky, senorita, for few men dare halt there, as they say the place is haunted by ghosts of dead padres and nuns."

"So much the better, Antone, for I will not have the living to fear."

"But I am glad that we changed our course, and did not make the big circuit to the south, for I am sure that we have no pursuers upon our track."

"I think we have covered our trail well, senorita."

"And you return the same way to your home, Antone, and here is a piece of gold each for your squaw, boy, and pappooses."

"But, I am not to go back now, senorita?"

"Yes, Antone, for I can go on alone."

"You have paid me well enough, senorita, to go all the way with you."

"No, I prefer to go alone, and remember to say nothing about where I have gone."

"I will not betray you, senorita."

"I believe you, Antone; now good-by."

She grasped the rough hand of the peon, and then rode down toward the river, approaching the Mission from the other side, while Antone returned slowly toward his home, following the trail he had come.

Arriving near the old ruin, Lulu looked attentively before her, to see if it contained any living being.

But seeing a coyote dash out upon her approach, she was confident that she had nothing more to fear, and that it would not be there if human beings were about.

Riding into the room she found a good place for her horse, and so staked him out in a secluded wing, near which was the old chapel, where she determined to spend the night herself.

Then she strolled out to get some pieces of wood to make a fire, and cook her supper.

As she passed through a ruined arch, she saw far out upon the prairie two horsemen approaching.

Instantly she sought a good place of observation, and gazed attentively at them.

"They are cowboys, I think," she said.

"They are looking upon the prairie as though searching for a trail, and they come from a direction in which I may look for pursuers, if they only knew I came this way."

Attentively she watched the two horsemen as they drew nearer, and then her face suddenly paled, as she said:

"The Virgin forbid! it is Henrico Brent, and Dan, the cowboy."

"Yes, I know they have had some inkling as to which way I have taken, and are in chase of me."

"But it will take better men than are you two, to carry me back," and she hastily sought a hiding-place.

Soon after Henrico Brent and his ally, Cowboy Dan, rode into the old ruin, glancing anxiously about them, for they had heard the weird stories told of the place, and did not like the locality with night coming on.

"She has not arrived yet, Dan," said Henrico, and Lulu, who was not thirty paces from him, heard his words.

"I hope she'll come soon, for I don't like this place at night."

"If she does not come by sunset, we need not expect her until to-morrow."

"Then we will go out on the prairie and camp, for I don't wish to stay here."

"All right, Dan, for I am willing, as I don't like the old tomb myself."

"What do you intend to do with her, Henrico, when you catch her?"

"She stole four thousand dollars of my mother's money, and I intend to take it from her."

"After I get that I will turn her loose, and let her go her way."

"She'll show fight, for I know her."

"She may, but we'll have the drop on her and the peon too; but, as he is along, Dan, I do not wish to be known as coming after the girl to get the money, so I have brought these two disguises for us."

"What are they?"

"False beards which I have worn at masked fandangoes, and Mexican dresses."

"No one would know us with these on."

"I know you, Henrico Brent, and I have the drop on you, coward that you are."

With a yell the two men sprang to their feet, and drawing his revolver Cowboy Dan fired at random.

But with the second shot there mingled another, and the cowboy dropped dead.

"Hold! move and I will kill you, Henrico Brent," and Lulu covered him with her still smoking pistol.

As for Henrico Brent, he was so intensely surprised that he seemed dazed and stood with his arms hanging listlessly by his side, his face the picture of horror.

"Coward, you came after me to rob me, and upon your head be that man's life, for I was compelled to kill him, seeing that he was mad with fright."

"As for you, I spare you; but, not wishing to be tracked and murdered, I will deprive you of the means of doing me harm."

With this Lulu boldly stepped forward and disarmed the man, who offered no resistance.

"Your horse and the pony of Cowboy Dan I will carry with me, releasing them when I see fit, and they will probably return home; but you will have to walk back."

"Now, sir, as you caused that man's death, dig his grave."

"Here is your knife, so lose no time."

"But, Lulu—"

"Silence! and to work digging a grave for that man or I will kill you as I would a coyote!"

He saw that she was in earnest, and he set to work with a will, digging a grave in the soft earth.

She stood over him until the body was placed in it, and the grave filled in, and then she said sternly:

"Now, Henrico Brent, you start for home."

"Give me my horse!" he sullenly said.

"I will give you a bullet in your brain if you stop to parley."

He muttered a curse, and turning, left the ruin.

She watched him until he was some distance off, and then, mounting her horse and leading the other two, pressed rapidly on across the prairies.

Until midnight she held on her way, and then she turned the two led horses loose, and went into camp in a clump of timber, to take the rest she and her pony so much needed, while she smiled grimly at the thought that the man who had attempted to rob her was trudging along on foot over the dark prairies.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEAD SHOT DANDY TO THE RESCUE.

I LEFT Dead Shot Dandy sitting upon the back of his matchless black horse, just in the edge of the chaparral.

His keen ears had caught the sound of hoof-strokes upon the prairie.

Listening attentively, he soon discerned that they were coming toward where he then was.

His practiced ear told him that there were less than half a dozen in all, and he said, quietly:

"With this chaparral at my back, and which I know as I do my own cabin, there is nothing for me to fear."

"So I will wait."

This he did for awhile, and then his keen sense of hearing and skill as a prairieman caused him to make another discovery.

"There is one horse in advance of the others," he said.

"Yes, it is a chase."

"What can it mean?"

Awhile longer he waited, and then he continued:

"Perhaps Benito has been accused of aiding my escape, and has had to fly."

"If so, I'll check his pursuers."

Nearer and nearer the horsemen came, and again Dead Shot spoke aloud:

"That leading horse is shot, and the others are not."

"From the strokes there are four animals in pursuit, and I will give their riders a surprise."

A moment after there dashed into view a single horseman.

And then, just as the shadowy outlines of the others came in view, the leading horse went down from a shot fired by one of the pursuers.

There was a cry as the animal went down, and a yell followed.

"Indians!"

The word broke from the lips of Dead Shot, and then the noble black shot out from the shadows of the chaparral.

Straight at the pursuers he went, and there followed a hurried checking of steeds on their parts, a flying of hastily fired arrows, a shot or two, and then the rattle of Dead Shot Dandy's revolver.

Four times its trigger was pulled, four distinct ringing shots were heard, and as many ponies were running riderless over the prairie.

Drawing up by the side of the fugitive, Dead Shot found him pinned beneath his fallen horse, which had been killed by a shot from the Indian.

"Are you hurt, my friend?" he asked, in kindly tones.

"Yes, I am wounded with an arrow, and my leg is injured, though I do not think it is broken.

"But I suffer greatly."

The reply came in a soft, almost childish voice, and Dead Shot looked closely in the face of the speaker.

Then he took hold of the fallen horse, and with an effort of his great strength, raised him from off the leg of his rider, who said with a sigh of relief:

"There, now I suffer less, but I feel very dizzy.

"You saved my life, didn't you, and killed those four Indians?"

"Were you hurt?"

"Oh, no; but where were you going?"

"I was going to—I don't believe I remember, this arrow hurts me so—and—oh! I feel so strange."

"By Jove! the arrow is still sticking in his shoulder, and his strange manner leads me to fear it was poisoned," mused the scout.

Then he quickly drew the arrow from the wound and said:

"Come, my young friend, you must be cared for.

"I will take you to the fort with all haste."

Raising the slender form in his strong arms Dead Shot Dandy quickly mounted Night Hawk, and set off at a gallop for the fort, as the random talking of the one he had rescued proved to him that he was rapidly becoming delirious, and convinced him that the arrow had been poisoned.

"Come, Night Hawk, you have no time to lose, if you wish to save a life," cried Dead Shot Dandy.

Seemingly understanding the words of his master, Night Hawk sped on like the wind, little caring for the double weight he carried.

At last the lights of the fort appeared in sight, and straight toward the main entrance Dead Shot Dandy headed.

He saw that his escape had been discovered, from the excitement he heard within the stockade, and the flashing of lights within the camps beyond.

"I may have a squadron of cavalry after me in a minute or two," he muttered.

But boldly he dashed up near the gateway and said in ringing tones, as he drew his horse down to a halt:

"Ho, the sentinel!"

"Ay, ay, what is it?" cried the sentinel on duty, turning quickly toward him.

"I have here a young man, who has been severely wounded by Indians, with a poisoned arrow.

"Send out for him at once, for he needs the surgeon's care!"

"Bring him here, while I call the corporal of the guard," was the answer of the lieutenant.

"No, I will place him here on the prairie, and you can send after him.

"Then tell Colonel Du Barry that he will find the young man's saddle and bridle on his dead horse near the old encampment at the chaparrals."

"Who are you?" called out the corporal of the guard, who had now joined the sentinel.

"You will also find there four Indians that I killed as they were pursuing this boy," continued Dead Shot, unheeding the question of the corporal.

Dismounting, he gently laid the wounded youth, for such he appeared to be, down upon the grass, and sprung again into his saddle.

"I have left him here for you.

"Lose no time if you would save his life."

"Who are you?" again called out the corporal.

"I am Dead Shot Dandy!" was the ringing reply.

Then, amid the exclamations that followed this startling announcement, the daring horseman wheeled and darted away like the wind.

"Fire!"

The cry came from the startled corporal, as soon as he could collect his senses, and a scattered volley of musketry followed.

But the bullets flew wild of the flying rider as he sped like a rocket over the prairies, leaving excitement and confusion behind him in spite of its being a well-disciplined military camp.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THAT the sentinel was startled by the hail that saluted him, from out upon the prairie there was no doubt.

He had been more interested with the excitement within the stockade, than in looking for danger outside, and the ringing voice of Dead Shot Dandy quickly brought him to a realizing sense of his duties.

When he had aroused the corporal of the guard, that important personage did not care to advance and see who it was out upon the prairie unless he was well supported by soldiers, and these were quickly called to the front.

The form of a horse and rider could be seen through the darkness, it was true.

But were there not more hidden from view in the prairie grass further out?

The corporal summoned the sergeant, and then a skirmish line was thrown out and advanced rapidly when the startling information came from the lips of Dead Shot as to who he was.

In his surprise, that the very cause of the excitement within the fort should then be quietly hailing from without, the sergeant gave the order to fire.

But the shots flew wild, and the daring scout dashed away unharmed.

Upon the grass, tossing as in delirium and talking incoherently, the soldiers found the wounded youth.

Quickly they raised him in their strong arms and bore him gently into the fort, carrying him directly to headquarters, where Colonel Du Barry sat alone with his daughter, having just dismissed those who had been congregated there after the discovery of the scout's escape.

"What is it, Fielding?" said the colonel, anxiously, fearing that some officer had been hurt or killed, for he had heard the shots fired at Dead Shot Dandy as he rode away.

"A young man, yer Honor."

"What young man, sergeant?"

"I am not after knowing, sir."

"Is he dead?"

"No, sir, but he's in a bad way, and he looked so young and innocent I was after telling the men to bring him straight to you, sir."

By this time the four soldiers arrived with their load, and the form was laid upon a lounge.

"Quick, call Surgeon Otey!" cried the colonel.

"Oh, father! what a strangely handsome face," said Marie, as she bent over the youth.

It was indeed a beautiful face, flushed now with excitement and coming fever, and with eyes unnaturally bright.

The form was slender and clad in a corduroy suit, with top-boots, and sombrero drawn down tight upon the forehead.

About the slender waist was a belt with a bowie-knife and two revolvers, and one hand clasped something closely that was in an inner breast-pocket.

"Where did you find this youth, sergeant?" asked the colonel, as that officer returned and reported:

"The surgeon is after coming at once, sir."

"I found him out on the prairie, sir, where that terror of a man left him, sir."

"What terror of a man, Fielding?"

"Dead Shot, to be sure, sir."

"Dead Shot?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sergeant, tell me just how this poor youth came into your hands."

In a few words the sergeant told all that he had heard from the sentinel and corporal, and just what had been said by the scout about the youth having been wounded with a poisoned arrow.

"It is remarkable that Dead Shot should have brought him right to the very stockade,

when he knows that we were all aroused by his escape.

"But it is just like the man, and pursuit would be useless, for my whole command could not catch him now if he was mounted as you say, sergeant."

"Oh! he's mounted, sir, and on a horse that went off like the wind, sir."

"Poor boy," and the colonel turned again to the youth, while he added:

"It is this poisoned arrow wound that has thrown him into delirium."

"I only hope that Otey will be able to save him."

"There seems some strange mystery in this, that Dead Shot Dandy should bring to the fort another boy."

"It is strange, father, and I wonder where he could have found the youth?" said Marie.

"Out upon the prairies somewhere, as he was escaping."

"And doubtless he rescued him from deadly danger, for it would be just like that remarkable man."

"Ah! there is Otey now."

The surgeon just then entered and the colonel said quickly:

"Otey, here is a youth, brought to the stockade gate by that strange fellow, Dead Shot Dandy, not three hours after his escape."

"He reported to the sentinel that the boy had been wounded by Indians, and with a poisoned arrow, so I at once sent for you."

Surgeon Otey was a kind-hearted man, and said gently:

"Poor fellow!" as he laid his fingers upon the throbbing pulse.

Then he took the hand from the inner breast-pocket, and saw that it grasped a wallet of leather.

"You had better take this, sir, for it contains money," said the surgeon.

"Send Paymaster Leighton here, orderly," called out the colonel, while he added: "I will give it into his charge."

The surgeon then bent over the boy, glanced at the wound, and then again eyed the youth closely.

"Well, Otey, what are his chances?"

"Her chances are fair, I hope, sir."

"Her?" cried Colonel Du Barry, in surprise, while Marie started forward.

"Yes, sir, for that is not a youth, but a maiden."

Amid the exclamations of surprise that followed, Paymaster Leighton entered the room, and as his eyes fell upon the face of the one who lay upon the lounge, he cried!

"What! Miss Dale here, and ill?"

"Miss Dale?"

"Yes, colonel; no, it is a youth; but no—I am right, it is Lulu Dale, the daughter of Bronze Bill, for I know her in spite of her male attire and short hair," cried the lieutenant, excitedly.

"Surgeon Otey, take the poor girl to my room, and I will be her nurse," said Marie Du Barry, and her wish was at once obeyed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SILENT MESSENGER.

As soon as he felt that poor Lulu was in safe

hands, Colonel Du Barry determined to take steps to try and capture Dead Shot Dandy, though he had little hope of doing so, and knew that the undertaking was a great one.

Still, if he did not make every effort to recapture him, the men would think that as his daughter had released him, he had connived at his escape, for the colonel's friendship for the scout was well known.

Still he believed Dead Shot Dandy to have been a traitor, and guilty of the charges made against him, and for which he had been condemned to death.

To carry out his plan he was about to send for Lieutenant Lancaster, when Captain Cecil Lorne entered the room.

He still wore his wounded arm in a sling, yet seemed not to suffer, and said promptly:

"I will report for duty, Colonel Du Barry, if you desire to send a party in chase of Dead Shot."

"I was just about to send for Lancaster, and ask him to go; but are you well enough, Lorne?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"You know that I did not intend to pursue him until morning, knowing that it would be useless to turn the men out to-night?"

"Yes, sir, so you decided."

"But now, as he has come to our very gates, and left that wounded girl—"

"Leighton just told me, sir, who she was."

"Yes, and she was brought here by Dead Shot, who says that her dead horse and traps, with four red-skins that he has killed lie there also."

"So I heard, sir."

"Well, I will send Lancaster and a few men there to see about that, while, if you really wish to go upon this expedition, you can order out sixty men—"

"So large a force, sir?"

"Yes, I wish you to take sixty troopers and fifteen scouts, for my desire is to have you strike the trail of Dead Shot, and follow it directly to the rendezvous of the Marauders."

"A good idea, sir, so that the question can be settled at once as to whether he is their chief or not."

"As to that, I feel that he is; but I desire to make this determined effort to break up the band."

"Now, you had better give orders to get pack-horses ready, with ten days' provision at least, and start as soon as you can do so."

"I will get off within an hour, sir," and Cecil Lorne left the room.

"Orderly, send Keno Kit to me," called out the colonel.

That worthy soon arrived.

"Waal, col'nel, I are here."

"I wish you to go with Captain Lorne upon a scouting expedition."

"Monte are already fixin' fer that leetle rackets, col'nel."

"Go and tell Monte that my orders are that you go."

"That settles it, sir, an' thanks."

"Then select fifteen of your best men, pick your horses and be ready at the earliest moment."

"I'll do it."

"Now go and tell Monte and give your orders and return to me here."

The scout disappeared, and a moment after Captain Lorne entered.

"All are nearly ready, sir, and I sent Lancaster after the bodies," he reported.

"Then await his return, please, before you start."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Lorne, let me request, if you come up with Dead Shot, that you give orders to fire upon him, for I would rather have him killed that way than to have to execute him here."

"But, of course do not let it be suspected that I have such intention."

"Certainly not, Colonel Du Barry, and I will obey your orders, for I would rather have Dead Shot killed in battle than have to see him executed."

Just then Keno Kit returned and reported:

"Col'nel, I hev give my orders, an' Monte kicked like a mule about it; but in course it don't do him no good."

"I will stand no nonsense from that man, Keno Kit."

"And now let me tell you that, if you get the opportunity, it would be better to shoot Dead Shot on the field than to bring him back here to die."

"Yes, col'nel, yer head are level thar."

"Now, where is Benito?"

"Thet Boy Bugler are tunin' up his horn, an' rubbin' up his weepins ter go along, too."

"Do you wish him, Lorne?"

"Indeed I do, sir, though I gave him no orders to go."

"The young scamp would have skipped off and taken the chances of my displeasure."

"But let him go— Ah! here is Lancaster!"

The lieutenant entered, and a soldier followed him bearing a saddle and bridle of the Mexican pattern, and superbly mounted.

"I found the dead horse, sir, and took these from him," he said.

"And the Indians?"

"Lay there dead, sir, and Driscoll, the scout, scalped them."

"They were Comanches, and we caught their ponies, sir."

"You saw no trace of Dead Shot Dandy?"

"None, sir, and the sentinel said that he went to the northward, and not toward the chaparral."

"Thank you, Lancaster," and turning to Captain Lorne, the colonel continued:

"Now, captain, you can get off as soon as you wish, and I hope to have a good report from you."

"If you can strike a blow at any Indian camp, do so, and if you need more men send for them."

The young officer thanked his superior and left the room, and found his men mustered and ready, with Benito keeping out of sight.

"Where is the Boy Bugler?" he asked, amused at Benito's desire to slip off with him, for fear the colonel might not let him go.

"I am here, sir," and Benito came forward.

"All right, Benito, you go with me."

"Thank you, sir," and the boy's bugle at

once broke forth in a ringing strain as the troopers wound out of the fort.

With the first dawn of day the scouts went to work looking for Dead Shot's trail, and almost instantly Keno Kit hit upon tracks of a single horse.

"Did you come this way, Boy Boogler, when yer was wild-horse huntin'?" he asked.

"No."

"Waal, these tracks is made by thet black o' Dead Shot's, fer I knows 'em well."

"The animal was not at the old encampment, for I went with Lieutenant Lancaster, and he was gone," whispered Benito to the scout.

"Then Dead Shot has found his own horse wandering about," said Captain Lorne.

"Yas, cap'n, it do look thet way."

"Ef yer calls a halt fer breakfast, an' gives me a couple o' horses, I'll jist tell yer whar this trail comes from an' all about it."

This was at once done, and Keno Kit started upon the back trail, while the soldiers cooked their morning meal and lay down to rest in the shelter of a grove of timber.

Keno Kit took the trail back to the old encampment, followed it from there to the spot where Dead Shot had placed the wounded girl, Lulu, upon the prairie near the fort, and, without a word to those who called out to him from the stockade and watched his movements, he went off on a gallop in the direction which the scout had taken.

He reached the command just as Captain Lorne was becoming anxious about him, for his two hours had reached up to noon.

An hour's rest, however, was all that he wanted for himself and horse, and then he led the command on at a rapid pace, following the trail with the same unerring instinct that a hound would have shown.

At night a halt was called in the foot-hills, and the party went into camp just where Dead Shot had done the same, for his fire was still burning where he had cooked his breakfast, and doubtless passed the greater part of the day in rest.

The sentinels were at once placed, for the Indian country was not far away, and the soldiers sought rest, well knowing that hardships were before them.

Around the headquarter camp-fire sat Cecil Lorne, Benito, Keno Kit and several officers, who comprised the captain's mess while upon the march.

They were discussing the probable route taken by Dead Shot, and where the camp of the Marauders would be most likely found, when suddenly there was a whirring sound, a sharp thud, and an arrow stuck quivering in the tree against which Captain Lorne was leaning, and not a foot above his head.

All started to their feet, but Keno Kit quickly drew from the arrow a piece of paper, with the quiet remark:

"This are a leetle bizziness note, I guesses, cap'n."

Quickly the piece of paper, which had been wrapped around the head of the arrow, was seized and unfolded by Cecil Lorne.

Upon it, written in lead pencil, was the following, and he read it aloud:

"CAPTAIN CECIL LORNE:—

"SIR:— I have to inform you that you have gone into camp within two leagues of a camp of two hundred Comanche warriors, who are on the war-path to avenge your attacks against their villages.

"Their scouts saw you go into camp, as I did, and they intend attacking you in one grand charge just before dawn.

"I crept up to their guard, killed him, and heard their plot, and send you this silent messenger of warning with his bow and arrow.

"The camp of the Indians is in Mustang Gorge, which Keno Kit, whom I see seated by your side, knows well.

"My advice is to attack from the South and you thus pen the red-skins in among the walls of rocks.

"Let your scouts attack by firing upon their camp, then half of your troopers charge, and the remainder follow in two separate bodies, so as to give an idea of greater strength than you have.

"I have killed, as I said, the Indian sentinel on the left, and I will now go and send the one on the right to join him in the Happy Hunting-Grounds, so that you will have no difficulty in surprising the entire band, and with sharp work can give them a lesson that will be remembered.

"Pardon my advice, but I know the ground and the force you have to attack.

"With respect,

"Duke Decatur.

"The Dead Shot Dandy."

"Well, this is remarkable," said Captain Lorne.

"No, it are jist like Dead Shot, an' he jist crept in atween them blind sent'nels an' shooted this arrer right inter our midst," said Keno Kit.

"You know the Mustang Gorge, Keno Kit?"

"Waal, I does, cap'n, an' it are just as Dead Shot says."

"Then we will move at once, and you scout on ahead to see if all is right."

"I'll do it."

"Will you trust that man, sir?" asked one of the officers.

"Assuredly, Mercer; why not?"

"I feared he might lead you into a trap."

"Oh, no; I'll trust him," was the confident answer, and ten minutes after the whole command were moving to attack upon those, who, some hours later expected to surprise the soldiers and hang their scalps at their belts.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE surprise of the Indians was complete, for the troopers got into their camp, as Dead Shot had removed the two red-skin sentinels before their presence was suspected.

Sleeping soundly they were dreaming of red trophies to be secured with the dawn, and were awakened by a volley that killed a score of them.

Another volley greeted them as they sprung to their feet, and then the troopers dashed in to close quarters with their revolvers, and half a hundred warriors had bitten the dust before a single scout or soldier had fallen.

Hemmed in, the red-skins stood at bay; but many were armed only with lances, not having the time to seize their bows and arrows,

and they fell before the unerring aim of their foes.

At last a few made a grand rush, and broke through the line, flying to the mountains.

But their ponies were left behind, and half of the red band lay dead or dying in Mustang Gorge.

Thus was the victory complete for the soldiers, and Captain Cecil Lorne congratulated himself over his triumph, though he had lost an officer, two non-commissioned officers killed, and several soldiers and scouts killed, and had a score of wounded men to bear back to the fort.

Through the fight Keno Kit and Benito, the Boy Bugler, had been the most conspicuous for their daring, and were complimented by Cecil Lorne in the highest terms.

After the dead were buried, and the wounded doctored up as well as possible by the assistant surgeon of the fort, the command started on its way back, going by slow and easy stages.

The Boy Bugler and Keno Kit had been sent on ahead to report the battle, and have ambulances sent to meet the wounded, and their arrival with the news was greeted with ringing cheers.

"Of course Lorne gave up all idea of pursuing Dead Shot?" said Colonel Du Barry, when Benito had made his report.

"Oh, yes, sir, and Dead Shot's rifle was cracking through the whole fight."

"What! did he join you?"

"No, sir, but he hung about in thickets, watching his chances and picked off the redskins, for as soon as the men charged he lighted several fires which he had ready, and made all as bright as day."

"If that man came in and surrendered now I would pardon him," said the colonel.

"I wish he would come, sir; but he deserves pardon, for he saved the life of Captain Lorne."

"Ah! how was that, Benito?"

"He killed an Indian who was about to run him through the body with a lance, when the captain's horse was shot and fell upon him."

"Then I shall post notices on the different trails, promising pardon to Dead Shot if he will come in and surrender, and pledge himself to give up his marauding band," said the colonel earnestly.

And such placards were written and posted up here and there.

But weeks passed and Dead Shot did not surrender.

But, on the contrary, the Marauders of the Rio Grande became daily more daring, until the entire force of the fort was kept busy trying to capture them and prevent their depredations upon settlers, against trains, and sometimes upon the stock of the fort itself.

At the head of his Masked Marauders, mounted upon his superb black steed, and wearing no mask, was frequently seen Dead Shot Dandy, but whom Benito, Keno Kit and Marie Du Barry insisted upon saying was not the scout, but *Dead Shot Dandy's Double*.

As for Lulu Dale, under the skillful care of Surgeon Dalton Otey, and the skillful nursing of Marie, she soon rallied, and the colonel told her that she should remain at the fort as

his adopted daughter, and the lonely girl seemed most glad to do so, for there she found only kindness from those whom she knew to be true friends.

Thus life glided by to those who have been characters in my romance, some happy, some sorrowful, amid the wild scenes in which their destinies had cast them, upon the far border of the Lone Star State.

THE END.

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